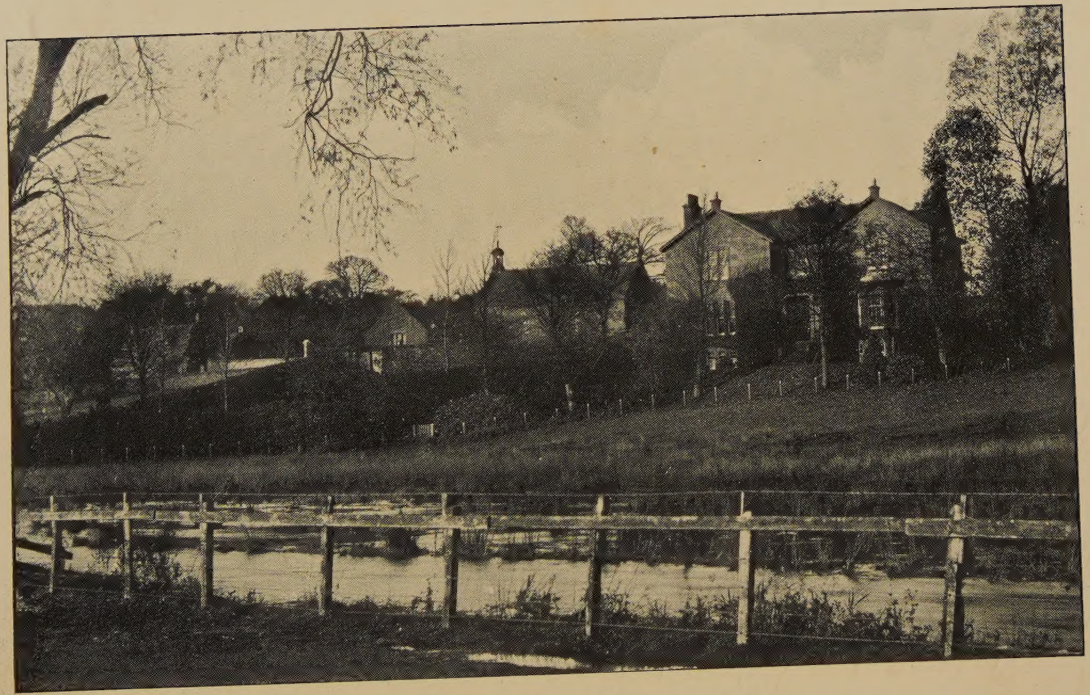

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THE NEW MANSE.

Close to Nature's Heart

BY

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MINISTER OF LAUDER

WITH FRONTISPIECE

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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MCMVIII

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TO

THE PEOPLE

AMONG WHOM MOST OF THEM WERE WRITTEN, AND AS A MEMORY OF A HAPPY MINISTRY IN GUTHRIE, THESE NATURE SKETCHES ARE WARMLY DEDICATED.

NOTE.

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Close to Nature's Heart.

THE NEW MANSE.

A BALCONY projects over the manse door with an upper window opening to it. Beneath is the gravelled drive leading to Station Road, and on the far side are trees all the way down. What a motley collection of timber these trees form! Near the balcony is a tall aspen; then, in close succession, a chestnut, sycamore, gean, an Ontario poplar, and a bushy lilac. One of the finest of them all is an ash farther down the drive—a real "Venus of the Woods" for proportion and shape. An opposite lime interlaces its branches with those of the ash, and there, in the lengthening nights, the shadow is deepest. Nearer the tennis-green, whitebeam, beech, mountain-ash, and elm trees grow.

What the manse grounds lose in symmetry from so many different trees, they gain in character and

variety. There is a greater interest in watching the coming of leaf and blossom. Trees of the same kind vary a good deal: when one sycamore is well into leaf, another has only begun to open its buds. But this difference is much more marked in the different varieties of trees. The manse poplars are the earliest to leaf in the parish; by the second week of April they are covered with delicate orange-green foliage. Sycamore and chestnut rush into leaf soon after, and as the days grow hotter, beech, elm, and lime. Aspen and ash are latest of all; some years they do not reach full leaf until the middle of June.

There is a wider difference still in the season of their flowering. Alder and birch in the marsh by the ash-tree are covered with catkins early in the year. The elm is faint misty purple with tiny flowers on the first days of March. Sycamores have large ruddy buds, from which the greenish-yellow blossom and the leaves come together. About the same season—early in May—ash blossom shows as dark clumps crowning the leafless twigs. Then, too, the gean-tree is covered with a bridal veil of snowy flower. Last of all, the linden puts forth its perfume-laden blossom. When the pastures are becoming scorched and bare, and the earlier clover has been stripped of its honeyed stores, towards the end of July, every lime-tree is murmurous with the sound of bees.

Under the trees by the drive are laurels, and

large rhododendron bushes covered in summer with flower. An early crimson one flowers a full month before the others. Growing beneath a gean-tree, the sprays and masses of gean blossom above and about it make a lovely harmony of white and crimson flowers. When the chestnuts are covered with tall creamy spires it is pleasant to sit in the balcony. The evenings have grown mild, and the air is full of the teeming life of a summer night. In the soft meditative stillness that follows sundown fancy grows active, and the mild air, like a soothing opiate, is full of sweet dreams. Then the chestnut flowers are aspirations that rise straight to heaven from the outstretched leaves like the hands of a multitude at prayer.

Opening bud and full-blown rose cover the *Gloire de Dijon* by the drawing-room window. Some of the sprays hang across the panes, bending under their weight of flowers. Ivy tendrils overgrow the low iron railing of the balcony, and intertwine to form a bank of leafy green. The manse has been built on a sloping terrace looking southward. The trees in front of it make a setting of vivid green foliage for part of the rushy field that reaches to the stream. Under the arch of a low bridge crossed by the road, dippers nest. Summer and winter the old birds sing their hurried notes from a large stone farther down the stream. At night the murmur of flowing water fills the air with a soft steady rush, as of the wind in a distant wood.

Nearer than the bridge is a marsh enclosed from the field by a hedge of hawthorn and beech—a little bit of wild nature gathered into the manse grounds. In the springtime marsh marigolds and cuckoo flowers grow all over it. Near the loose, mossed wall under the hedge, where the ground is drier, delicate lilac-veined flowers of wood-sorrel hang their tiny bells above the pale-green leaves. By autumn the marsh is a thicket of meadow-sweet, marsh thistles, yellow irises, and tall grasses. Young trees are growing rapidly in it, and the large rhododendron bushes almost hide it from the drive.

But bending over the railing of the balcony, there —almost beneath on the right—is the narrow iron gate that opens to the garden. Behind the tall yew hedge, it lies on a sunny slope. Fruit trees cover the walls and the side of the manse that lies open to it. In April the study window is framed in a profusion of pear-tree blossom. We can see from this elevated seat but a small part of the garden—the sheltered walk, sacred to deeper thought, between the hedge and a row of bushes, and a fern-covered rockery beyond. A dear old-fashioned place it is, with all the commoner flowers, from the first yellow aconite to the last dahlia and chrysanthemum of the year. There, too, are gillyflowers, pinks, and great crimson peonies. The night air above the box-edged walks is heavy in their season with the scent of sweet violets, lily of the valley, roses, white jasmine, and other fragrant flowers.

On the other side of the house, from the garden, the tennis-green completes the manse grounds. The bushes and trees, with the undisturbed quiet, make them a favourite sanctuary for the birds. A great many different kinds visit them: in the cold season the thick-leaved evergreens are a cosy roosting-place. Last winter a number of redwings came to them every evening. Shy, wary birds, they settled on the leafless trees, with long plaintive calls, before disappearing among the bushes; and one or two seemed to act as sentinels, until the bare, frosty afterglow of December began to fade in night. The redwings left the grounds as the days lengthened, but a great many pied wagtails took their place. These birds continued until the early summer, gathering to the bushes along the marsh at sunset. Some of them evidently came from long distances, they descended from such a height in the air. If the evergreens were brushed with the hand they rose into all the trees about with loud *tsee-wits*. Latterly, at least, perhaps a mutual desire for companionship brought them together, when the female birds were busy with nesting cares. Often quite sixty came, all beautifully marked males.

The wild creatures of the woods and fields freely visit the grounds. From the ditches near, where they make their purring sounds on mild March days, frogs wander to the marsh. The garden has always two or three patriarchal toads: these are valued inmates. Moles and occasional field-mice burrow in

the ground, and tiny shrews rustle through the summer grasses. Squirrels are often seen in the trees. They climb the ivy on the manse itself, and run along the garden walls, stopping by the way with odd jerking motions to see that everything is safe. The abundance of wood around makes them very plentiful.

A family of hedgehogs have lived in the yew hedge for several years. On moist summer nights the young feed near the bushes. The old ones sometimes cross the gravel by the door on their way to the field. They call to one another with a strange half-whistling, half-screaming note. With the chillier autumn nights they all disappear and spend their winter somewhere in the thick covert of the hedge in a warm bed of leaves.

Hares have their forms among the rushes and bennets of the field. They enter the grounds for the sweeter grasses. One evening a hare was eating quietly on the embankment. Disturbed by approaching footsteps, he cowered down among the grasses and wild flowers. Within a few feet of the passer-by he lay close to the ground, his keen eye watching every movement.

The abundance of birds often brings weasels; they follow the open stone walls from the fields. A summer ago one weasel hunted two blackbirds beside the marsh. The birds kept in the middle of the drive, taking short flights whenever their tiny enemy came too near. After each unsuccessful rush the

weasel returned to the cover of the grass. For a moment it was hidden, then, somewhere near, the narrow chestnut head with its cunning, glittering eyes and the white breast showed, to disappear rapidly again. But for one's knowledge of the creature's bloodthirsty ways, it might have been woodland sport. The birds always returned to the same place, exposing themselves again and again to these dangerous rushes, to distract the weasel's attention from their young in the bushes.

There are other wild creatures than these. Bird and beast love the peaceful quiet of the manse grounds. All the different forms of wild life come and go. Day and night trains pass on the railway across the stream. The swift mails come with a hurried rush; the heavier goods go by with a deeper roll. Outside the gate is the traffic of Station Road. People linger by the bridge, above the rushing water, to talk and laugh when the day's toil is over. But the wild creatures have grown familiar with all these sounds. Inside the manse grounds they live in a little Arcadia of their own, happy in the sunshine of the passing hour.

The manse itself crowns and gives a human interest to everything about it. Above the wide steps that lead between two yew-trees to the doorway the balcony forms a portico, supported by large sandstone pillars. Honeysuckle, clematis, roses, ivy, and other plants cover a large part of the house, and make it beautiful all the year. The trees and its

own position shelter it from the cold east winds that sweep over the fields from the sea. All the beauty of the grounds gathers round the manse. Everything seems to find expression through it. For it the daffodils and blue anemones grow under the shelter of the tennis-green wall. For it the tufts of large-flowered marguerites gleam in the waning light, and the speedwell opens its blue eyes to the sunshine on the grassy bank. Garden and wild flower, blossoming shrub and leafing tree, bird and wild creature that love them, they add their tribute of beauty and interest to the grounds, and the manse gives a richer beauty and a deeper interest to them all.

THE OLD MANSE.

FROM the manse garden you can see the roof of an old ruinous building among the trees. The rest of it is almost hidden behind dense evergreens, and every summer hides it more completely. This is the old manse: it lies farther up the stream, on the other side of the road, just inside the Castle grounds. Close to the lodge a wooden gateway admits you from the avenue. The thicket of old garden shrubs makes it difficult to get round the gable to the front entrance of the house, but there is a door on the side of the drive.

Inside the old manse the eye needs a short time to get familiar with the dim light from the shadow of bush and tree. On the left, close to the door, is the kitchen, a broken range still in the fireplace. A narrow passage leads past it to the doorway that opens into the front hall. The door was once covered with crimson baize cloth, and there are some faded fragments on it still.

From the hall a staircase mounts to the upper rooms. Some of the lower flagstones have been removed for other purposes, and the want of them

makes it difficult to ascend. It would be wellnigh impossible were it not for holes in the shattered masonry on one side. By the aid of these we can always get to the safer steps above.

Where the staircase looks out on the avenue is a landing with steps leading to the upper rooms in the back part of the house. One room lies open through the centre of the ceiling to the sky; the roof has given way above, and the constant entrance of rain and snow has brought down the plaster. The lath is partly exposed, and in part quite broken through under the weight of falling slates. Beneath this yawning hole the wooden flooring has become sodden and decayed; but we may walk with comparative safety over another part, careful to keep the feet on the strong beams underneath.

An air of silence and desolation pervades everything. Through the opening in the roof you can see the cloudless summer sky. The sunshine finds its way between the overshadowing trees. But nothing can bring back life to the old house; it is dead, like the generations that lived in it. A barn swallow comes calling to the window. The sound is welcome in the melancholy stillness. It comes again, *twit, twit,* and enters, but passes out immediately on finding an intruder. All round the cornices are swallows' nests: one has been placed over the window, the nest of the swallow twitting outside. A feather projects over the shallow mud-built shell. The hand can just reach it, but only a soft hollow of

downy feathers meets the touch. An unsightly hole in the wall was once the old fireplace. In a cranny alongside redbreasts had built their nest in the springtime, and an addled egg, dirty-white with reddish markings, is lying in the loose structure of moss and leaves.

By the staircase are more nests above the doors, and wherever the cornice affords sufficient support. The main stairway mounts from the landing to the rooms in front of the manse. These are more pretentious; two of them have dressing-rooms. The window-panes have long since been broken; sharp pieces of glass are all that remain of them.

A tangle of branches has grown about one window, and the twigs are pushing their way inside. On the floor near, with outstretched wings, lies a dead swallow. How beautiful it is, though the bird must have been dead for weeks. There are no disagreeable marks of decay; but the body has shrunken and feels quite light in the hand. The wings have not lost the living gloss nor the silky appearance of life. The throat has kept its rich chestnut colour, and the tail is beautifully forked. It must have died soon after coming from the South; probably the cold snap in the end of April killed it—the first swallows come to the old manse. So many weary miles over land and sea, to be cut down on the threshold of its season of love and loving cares, the heart sorrows over it as over an unfulfilled life. Beautiful still, but it is

dead, dead like the old house and all the generation that inhabited it.

Downstairs pieces of broken furniture are lying in the public rooms. Large shreds of paper, torn down from above, hang on the walls, and there are bits of plaster and more shreds on the floor. The panels of a door have got broken. Bushes fill the space in front of one window, and the luxuriance of their leaves deepens the gloom.

All the sunshine and joy of life have left these rooms for ever. The ruined building is at the stage of decay that seems most sad. An empty house is always sad, like an empty heart. But at first the sadness is not so obtrusive as it becomes later, when, in the increasing evidences of desolation and decay, it finds a voice that falls on the spirit like a wail of grief. In course of years this oppressive feeling of desolation passes away from an old building. We look, unmoved by it, on the ruin of centuries. Ruin gradually becomes more natural; the human associations do not obtrude themselves—at most they linger about it as some faint memory that deepens the interest. But the old manse is in the visible agonies of decay; all the ghastliness and unsightliness of ruin fill every room. The darkness, the dead swallow, and the tender human associations that can never return become too depressing. One is glad, at last, to get through the front doorway, pushing aside the branches that have grown across it, to the fresh air outside.

Before the ruined house is a little open space enclosed on every side with shrubs and trees. Some one, with kindly care, has nailed to the wall a japonica bush that had fallen to the ground. To the right a thicket of holly and yew as tall as the building has grown up, and one or two plum-trees, untended by the pruning-knife, have reached as high as the eaves. Another thicket of holly, laurel, with an undergrowth of snowberry bushes, make a wall of greenery on the opposite side. Over them all are the spreading branches of two huge beeches that grow in the field. These are two of the finest trees around for height and great breadth of foliage.

The manse stands on a raised terrace. Steps have once led down from it to the garden beneath. Traces of the old paths are visible, but tall, slender-stemmed elms and sycamores have grown from them. The whole garden has become a grove of trees that have been growing ever since the house was abandoned, so fast does nature encroach on the work of man. Judged by the eye, they might be forty feet high, and give some hint of the passage of time.

Near the lower part of the garden, where it approaches the stream, a row of tough and gnarled apple-trees have preserved a struggling life, and two gooseberry bushes put out a few stunted leaves in spring. The air under the trees is full of the strange heavy odour of ground ivy. On the terrace

above germander speedwell shows its beautiful blue to every stray ray of sunshine, and crinkled primrose leaves are fast fading in the scanty grass. Leopard's-bane flowers linger on their tall stems, but most of them have passed. Under the bushes and along the garden walls there is a rank profusion of nettles and rough chervil.

The old manse casts a depressing shadow on all it looks upon. The windows appear hollow orifices from which the life of the house has departed; at night their shutters and loose frames swing and crash in the wind. The rising blast, as it wails and groans through open passage and deserted room, might be a human being in distress. Softer gales rustle and sigh among the trees like the spirits of Ossian. From the chimney-tops the brown owl often hoots in the darkness.

Even now, from the shadowy garden, half hid among the trees, the manse has a haunted appearance. For me the whole place is full of ghosts. Through the empty window-frames, darkly shadowed by the leafage, faces of the past are constantly peering. Under the gnarled apple-trees, with the cross path beside them, fancy produces visible forms. I see an aged minister pacing slowly along, as in a cloistered walk apart from the world, his back bent under the burden of years, but his face bright with the light and peace of heaven. He is dead long since and his place forgotten. Somewhere among his people under the churchyard trees he rests in a

nameless grave. But unseen presences lurk everywhere in the depths of the shadow, and an eerie feeling creeps over the heart.

Across the falling wall the buttercups are casting their lavish gold over the rushy field. A whitethroat from some bushes takes short flights of song into the air. The stream flows slowly past the garden, so slowly as to make no sound. Large rugged willows grow on one bank of it, their trunks leaning in the direction of the flowing water. Meadow-sweet has sprung up luxuriantly among young trees that occupy part of the field, though it is not yet the season of the heavy-scented flower. The bright sunshine is lighting up everything, and increasing the pleasant effect of the vivid green of grass and leaf.

Nature by the old manse is always beautiful. In springtime the gean-trees, in front of the garden, hide the ruined house behind their masses of dazzling white. The great beeches gather into them the brightest tints of autumn. To-day there is a green light and a cool shadow under them, refreshing in the strong glare of unclouded June. Through the thick evergreens the beauty and the joy of nature steal in unconsciously from the outside world of life and light. They are as soul glimpses of another life flooding with its sunshine the care and sorrow of this. Under their influence the thoughts grow brighter, and, for a time, the desolation of the empty manse is forgotten.

Do not let us spoil the thought by passing through the dingy rooms again. There is another way between the laurels and prickly hollies for those who know it. Stooping to follow it, we are out again in the sunshine, and shall forget the desolation of the place as we forget the last agonies and pallid features of our dead in the life that went before. The old manse was a home to generation after generation of living beings. Memories of love and quiet happiness gathered round its walls and the garden that has become a waste. Sons of the house turned tender thoughts to it from far-off lands. They have all passed, and it is fast passing. But this is a cherished persuasion of mine, and grows with the years that take so much from us—that all our past lies waiting for us somewhere in the future. Life rounds upon itself as a great wheel revolving along ever higher levels. So the past will come back to us, and all that made it so full of happiness. The old scenes themselves will have their place in it. That which has been may as easily be again. I look forward to the days that time has swept away, and to the scenes that made them so happy. To another it may be a dream; for me it has come to be a deeply rooted belief. If it appear to you impossible, at least of the old manse let the joy and love of the past, realised through this living beauty of nature, soften all the unsightliness of ruin beneath their transfiguring light.

COMING OF SPRING.

I.

ONE of the first notes of returning spring is the churring call of the partridge in the fields at evening. Though heard at other seasons, as spring approaches it appeals most to the ear. The birds utter it when they are separated from one another, a pleasant and yet a melancholy, half-querulous sound. On a frosty spring night, while the afterglow is lingering in the west, partridges make their complaint from field to field—*chicurr, chicurr*—filling the air with their mimic grief. The note harmonizes perfectly with the sobered feeling of evening, and there is in it something homely, something purely of the country. The countryman recalls it, as one of the happy memories of the old life in the fields, when he goes to other lands.

Some birds anticipate the spring with their song. The corn-bunting is one of them: he sings almost all the year. One year we noted it, and found only a single month without a corn-bunting's song; and some other one may have heard it then. In dull

November he repeats it hour by hour until night-fall. A short monotonous song, a hurried babble of broken notes, it sounds discordant when the lark is singing from the cloud-flecked April sky, or the blackbird and thrush are trilling forth their mellow notes from almost every tree. But under the chilly, dripping clouds of November, amid the silence of the fields, the heart finds a depth of tenderness in the corn-bunting's song: all the melody of the spring lies hid in it, a dream of fresh green leaves under the leafless trees.

By the house, wren, redbreast, and hedge-sparrow sing in the pale gleams of wintry sunshine. Brown linnets from the fields visit the trees and warble sweetly. In frost and snow, though the water runs dark and chilly round the stone where he sits, the dipper is never long silent. So fast do the notes come, they seem but a louder rush and murmur of the stream. On the roof the starling whistles through the coldest part of the year. He is an optimist by nature: a little sunshine sends him at once into song. First, a loud call as if he wanted you to listen, then faint and low, deep down in his throat with a gurgling melody, he repeats his happy notes. This lower melody, if melody it can be called, is the background of the starling's song: the bird has the power of continuing both together, as if one were his accompaniment to the other. A perfect mimic, he retains in his memory every kind of sound. Ducks quack, the cock crows from the

barnyard, a cat mews, and the moorhen *tuks* by the stream. On the windy moor the curlew is calling, a blackbird sings his fluted note, swallows twitter, and we look up half deceived at the grey clouds to see some trace of a gliding wing.

The starling sings, through the deadness and silence of winter, the songs of summer: he is an optimist in the dark days of the year. The cold has driven the redbreast to the shelter of the house; wren and hedge-sparrow have lost all heart to sing. But still the starling whistles on, casting his happy notes like summer radiance round about him. All the sweetness of the past is in them; but there is no regret now that it is gone. He recalls the past to make it the promise of the future, and, under the influence of his cheerful voice, memory begets hope. The past can never die; all that has been will be—the love, the joy, the song. So the starling sings in the winter of the earth and of man's experience, a messenger of hope, and his song goes to the heart.

The missel-thrush sometimes sings, loud and full-throated, from an ash by the road, on a mild December day. Before the severer weather of winter, last season's birds hurry over a few broken staves. So do older ones, as the lark, the chaffinch, and the thrush, though generally the notes want the completeness and abandon of spring. They are like voices murmuring half articulately in sleep. The birds sing them as if for themselves and not for another ear: they are low whispers, partial

and imperfect rehearsals of the coming concert of song.

A belated buttercup struggles to live until the snowdrops come. The gold is almost off its petals. Pale and wan as the sunshine that falls on it, the solitary flower rises from the faded grass by the path-side—pale and wan, and yet a joy, for it belongs to the future as well as to the past. A few feverfew flowers hang their sodden heads through the shortest days of the year in the turnip field. Under them chickweed opens its small white stars to the passing glints of sunshine. In the meadow you can always gather some daisies. They fill the pauses of the floral year; there is no month without them, any more than without the corn-bunting's song. The catkins on the willow-bushes of the moor are swelling before the year is ended; one or two, in spite of frosty winds, have already cast off their furred coats. There are fresh leaves on the wild honeysuckle under the shelter of a large furze bush, and in one part this bush is aglow with early blossom. On the house a yellow jasmine is bursting into starry flowers; in the garden, near a sunny wall, are blue and pink hepaticas with some polyanthuses and sweet violets. Notes of gayer colour brighten the dullest season of the year.

"When does spring begin?" asked a curious friend of some of us by the blazing fire of a wintry night. One answered, "With February, of course!" adopting the common view. Another thought there might be a catch in the question, and suggested the day in

December when the sun turned on its northward course. Another, still, said that spring commenced immediately after the March equinox. We turned to a Book of Days, and found that spring began on the twenty-first of March. But when does it really begin? Definite days and dates are only for those that stay indoors; Nature does not acknowledge them. Out in the fields there is no fixed day for its beginning; the joy of springtime never ceases. To the open eye, spring travels round the year as well as round the earth with the sun. Nature is always renewing her youth, and she does it in every place. Every day, in the wood, or in the meadow, or by the stream, something has its spring. Every day the eye finds some new thing to note, something in the old place that was not there the day before. Perpetual interest because perpetual variety. An ever-changing background of sky and earth: one day radiant sunshine lighting all the landscape, another gigantic cloud-shadows hurrying over the fields. Constant change, too, of living interest; infinite play of life as well as of light. All through the summer there is an endless succession of wild flowers: one's autumn is another's spring. Under the yellow birches, from the leaf-strewn sward, and on the brown moor, bright-hued funguses grow in a night; when snow is falling and wintry winds blow chill, the lichens on the old wall are at their best, and the rich green mosses under the thick-branched spruces of the wood. The sacred fire of life is always burn-

ing, always breaking into new flame. Spring has no real beginning because it never ends.

II.

It is pleasant to watch the lengthening day. It is pleasant because it is the first great realisation of hope in the starling's song. The hardest part of winter is still to come. Bitter winds will blow, frost reign supreme on the waters, and deep storms cover the ground with snow. But hope rises in the heart with the turn of the day, and hope is life to the soul. Beast and bird and humblest plant feel it as well as man. Under the ground the tiny rootlet swells at its mystic touch, strange magnetic forces shoot up into the stem of the tree. The returning sun brings light, and light becomes hope—a dream of better things—and hope is their life.

Yellow aconite pushes through the frosty January ground; its bright flowers gleam from the naked border like new-fallen gold from the mint of the sun. Immediately afterwards snowdrops appear in a sheltered corner; their white bells are often hanging above the new-fallen snow. There are more white and blue sweet violets, and the jasmine on the wall is radiant along its slender twigs. By the stream, first of wild flowers, the butterbur sends up its white mounds of blossom. Bees visit it on sunny days to gather the earliest honey of the year.

When the first flowers are opening, the thrush has found his voice. One year a thrush was singing brightly by the middle of January, and somewhere between then and the end of the month, year by year, he breaks into song. In most places there are favourite spots where you are most likely to hear the earliest thrush. Here it is in tall beeches by the railway; among them he is in song a full week before his loud ringing notes are heard anywhere else around. There is something practical about the thrush's song; like the starling, he is a bringer of good tidings. He strives to idealise the real, to tell the listener how good a world this is with all its burden of care. He sings above the drive the whole day long. His notes seem to form themselves into words, as one listens to them from the doorway, fascinated by their wild melody. They are full of hope and promise, and all the world is with him as he sings, for he is the singer of his times: he gathers the beauty of the first snowdrop, the yellowing gorse on the moor, and the growing sunshine into his song. He is calling us to listen while he sings in the bare ash-tree. *Hear! hear! hear! Cheer up! cheer up! cheer up! Chut! chut! chut! chut! Look here! look here! look here! look here! Do you hear me! do you hear me! do you hear me! My! my! my! Cheer up! cheer up! cheer up! Joy! joy! joy!* So on the happy strain goes with constant variations. Occasionally a thrush exhibits a wonderful power of mimicry. One bird in the moorland wood could

imitate the call-notes of the redstart, the whinchat, and the curlew so perfectly that it was almost impossible to distinguish them. His usual perch was a branch of a withered fir-tree, and there, on spring evenings, he sang for hours, constantly blending with his own these other notes.

Later in the early year than the thrush, the blackbird begins his mellow song. The song of a dreamer, it has nothing definite, nothing tangible. His melting notes will not go into words. They are like feelings that rise in the heart before the deeply impressive in any of its forms, and lie outside the range of speech. There is a lusciousness, an ethereal sweetness, about the blackbird's song. He sings of the future and its glories, the things that eye hath not seen nor ear heard. Though he repeats the same strains again and again, they never grow monotonous. The heart cannot put them into words, and yet, through their influence, elevating thoughts and nobler impulses spring. These are the real meaning of the song because they come through it,—they interpret it as it interprets them.

Look at him as he sings, when the trees are hurrying into leaf, for his notes sound sweetest then. He is like a dreamer absorbed in the contemplation of his own exquisite dreams, the things that are unutterable to the ear and still so real to the heart. He *is* a dreamer, and sings for himself rather than for others. That is why his song is so beautiful. For himself, and yet for others as well;

he must dream and tell aloud his dreams in his own way whether the world will listen or not, for it is by struggling to impart them that he, too, understands them. He hardly moves while he sings: he is rapt in trancelike contemplation, as if he were some Indian *yogi*. The sun has set an hour since, the full moon is slowly climbing the eastern sky, but the blackbird sings on. The dewy evening air, that sets free the fragrance of the garden, gives a richer mellowness to his minstrelsy. Strain after strain in undiminishing sweetness, and then, as if the spell were suddenly broken, and he felt ashamed of dreaming so long, with a hurried *pink, pink* he disappears for the night in the thick covert of laurel bushes.

The large missel-thrush has been in voice since the earliest weeks of the year. He comes, day by day, to the tall willows by the stream, a conspicuous bird with his light-spotted breast. Through wind and rain, as often as in sunshine, he sings his hurried song. Twice or thrice he utters it from one leafless tree, then from another, and soon afterwards the notes are pealing from a third. They want the variety of the common thrush's strains, but are fuller and richer, a half-way approach to those of the blackbird. You must be somewhere near to enjoy their sweetness, and they seem to grow richer as the season proceeds.

With the rapidly lengthening day the volume of melody becomes fuller; more voices join it, and all

the birds sing more continuously. By the middle of February the lark is showering his jubilant notes above the fields, and from the trees the chaffinch repeats his happy, laughing song. Two or three weeks later greenfinches have returned to their old nesting sites, and the chorus of the early year is complete. In the brighter days of March it is at its fullest and best. Larks and corn-buntings are singing in the fields, the dipper and reed-bunting from the stream; by the house and in the woods all the thrush tribe are in full song, with redbreast, wren, chaffinch, greenfinch, yellow-hammer, and rose-linnet. With the departure of March the great swell of song begins somewhat to diminish. Willow-wrens, whitethroats, sedge-warblers, and other migrants, as soon as they arrive, add new notes to the bird chorus, but they do not make up for the power and fulness it has lost.

Along the banks of the stream spotted leaves of lesser celandine spring from the withered grass: there are some flowers already, and in another week, with sunshine, the stream-side will be yellow with them. A patch or two of golden saxifrage has begun to brighten a moist part of one bank. This is the time to hear the chorus of song at its best. The silence of winter, not long past, impresses it by contrast upon the ear; the trees are leafless, and do not deafen the notes; the birds throw their whole hearts into the singing, for the distracting cares of nesting have hardly yet begun; then the

March days are short enough to crowd the song together,—in later months the birds are singing their richest and fullest when most of us are still sound abed. After the early gush of song on a summer morning,—the first voices have begun in May about three o'clock,—but for the larks above the fields, some chaffinches, and other stray voices, there is a lull in the feathered concert until evening. But the whole March day seems to bubble over with song, and it extends far into the twilight. On an evening of the past March two planets were shining brightly in the west, Sirius and the stars of Orion were twinkling to the south, and overhead the Plough had become visible, while many birds were still singing.

The mellow notes of the blackbird fall on the ear from the bird chorus, like the rich, full tones of a highly gifted human voice, but the thrush is its leading minstrel. After a mild winter there seems no end to the number of singing thrushes. Here some private grounds are a great aviary of birds. High trees grow from a thick undergrowth of young firs and spruces that provide ideal nesting-places. On spring evenings, before these taller trees have begun to leaf, every one has a piping thrush. Often eight birds or more are singing quite near. Their notes pass into one another, and as each bird is at its own part of the song, the result is a deafening confusion of thrush melody. But wherever there is a bushy covert or clump of trees, there on a March

evening you may hear the thrush sing. Then the land is literally alive with their song; the glad notes meet and blend with one another over almost all its extent. Unless in the busier thoroughfares of a large city, one is never far from the sound of a singing thrush. What a great swell of song, and what an amount of pleasure and pleasant thoughts the glad notes bring to listening hearts!

The sap is mounting the tree, the young grass shoots flushing the meadow. Purple flowers are on the elm. An early dandelion on the bank has opened its broad disc to the sunshine. From the field outside a bright-winged tortoiseshell visits it. Another winter is past: the snow is over and gone.

THE HAUNT OF THE PIKE.

EARLY in spring we went to one of the lochs that lie to the west. Though late enough for pike, there was still a chance of a fish or two, and the lochs are always full of interest. Northward the hills were hazy in the distance, the nearer ones dappled with snow masses, a higher mountain-peak behind them pure white against the horizon. A touch of winter chilled the breeze that blew from them; but the air felt bracing and full of promise. As white as the snow itself, the smoke from heath fires lay above the uplands. The green flush of later spring had hardly touched the fields along the road, but on the railway embankment the newly opened coltsfoot flowers showed out from the neutral tints of last year's faded herbage.

First one loch and then a larger were passed in the broad valley to the right. Farther on the pointed spire of an old priory rose above its enclosing trees. Between this ruin and the road was more woodland, where, hidden in a deep hollow, lay the loch we were seeking. From the road itself,

though quite close, there is no trace of it, all that is visible being a long narrow belt of wood in the fields. But a short, green track, after a winding descent among the trees, brings you suddenly in sight of it,—a pretty, sunlit sheet of water, with wooded slopes on every side. The first feeling is one of surprise that a loch of such extent should be so near and yet so effectually concealed from the roadway. Hundreds of people pass it day by day without being aware of its existence.

The green path doubles about the end of the loch and along the farther side, as quiet and pleasant a woodland track as could well be. Spreading branches, from fir and other trees, make a dense canopy over it, and thickets of willow lie between it and the water. Some of these bushes were deeply submerged as we passed: the loch rises several feet in winter above its summer level.

Two woodmen were at work on a fallen tree that lay across the path. It had been there for months, and the grass was marked where passing feet had made a way round it. In such a quiet sylvan spot there was nothing to suggest human habitation. The lightly beaten track appeared no more than a fisherman's path. But after a few minutes' walk, bushes and trees abruptly fell away from the water, where it formed a shallow, rounded bay, and showed a dainty, Swiss-like cottage nestling in a green glade.

Appearing so unexpectedly, just as the loch itself had done, the building produced a feeling of pleased

surprise. With the lattice-work of its small, diamond-shaped windows, reproducing the interlacing twigs of the wood, the lichens on the roof, and a wooden verandah whose pillars were parts of tree trunks, nature had made it one with the native wildness of the scene. No words could well describe the charm of the place. It seemed a spot devoted to happiness and quiet content, a snug retreat that nature had provided outside the track of life's many ills. But alas! for appearances, and the dreams of happiness that they bring. The gamekeeper's wife within has been ailing for many years, and slowly wasting away with a hopeless trouble.

We waited outside until the old keeper should return from the round of his traps, putting up our rods the while. His dogs were barking loudly in their kennels, and leaping on the iron railing in front. From the house to the water reached a soft green slope. Snowdrops had begun to flower in large clumps there and along the side of the path. Under a slight breeze the water rose into wavelets that sparkled in the sunshine.

Sitting on the wooden bench in the open verandah, we could enjoy the peace and beauty about us. Tired of barking, the dogs had lain them quietly down again, but the chop of the woodman's axe still came from the fallen tree. *Chop! chop!* The noise, travelling over the water, filled the hollow, and the echoes from bank to bank prolonged it; then there was a pause. Above the trees larks

mounted into the sky from the fields outside, and we could hear both the common and missel thrush in full song. The coots were mating, and made a great scurrying and splashing as they chased one another, their dangling feet just touching the surface of the water. There were other notes of the coming spring, some of them too fine for the ear or the eye.

At last the gamekeeper joined us, swinging a rabbit-trap in one of his hands. He has been very busy all the morning. Rabbits are far too plentiful, and the tenants have begun to grumble. "They're aye grumblin' at ony rate," he adds. From one thing to another he passed, talking glibly all the time. His remarks were full of an old-world shrewdness, with a quaint pawkiness, and a power of expression that an orator might envy. He gestured rapidly as he spoke, and his quick, nervous eye gave an air of authority to all he said. A striking personality, such as one seldom meets in his own or any class, with conversational gifts that education alone could never give. He took us to a good fishing reach on the other side of the loch, and, happy in his listeners, continued his garrulous talk.

In his solitary wanderings through the woods the old man had thought much, and nature had given his thoughts a character and force of their own. His way of life made him think of men and things from an outside point of view. With it all there

was a deference of manner that never let him outstep the bounds of respect, and a kindliness of heart that gained him many friends.

The shooting under his care had been rented by several tenants, and he must have been a privileged servant with them all. One of them asked him, "Can you speak Gaelic?" "No, sir," came the ready retort, "but whan I'm angry I can speak some queer kinds o' Scotch." So he went on without a pause, flattered by the interest and the laughter that were a testimony to his powers, until we reached the fishing place.

From a small promontory where he left us, we could see from end to end of the loch. It was a fair width near the centre and less than a mile in length. Just out from us, beyond gunshot, was a flock of wild duck, several kinds among them. A pair of golden-eye were swimming farther down. Shyest of all, a sudden movement sent them into the air. These leave later in spring for their northern breeding-haunts, but most of the others nest on the lochs. Diving, splashing, and flying from point to point all about us, their hearts, like the coots', were full of joyous life.

As we watched them, a rarer water-bird suddenly appeared among the duck. The breast of the stranger was a conspicuous light colour, and it had a long, serpent-like head and neck. Another moment and it had vanished, to reappear in a different part of the loch. We recognised it then as the

great crested grebe. It had not long arrived, and, so far as we could see, was alone; but a week after we noticed its mate as well.

This later day we went boating after pike. The fishing proved hopeless, and we left it to watch the two grebes diving and reappearing on every side. The fascinating mystery of their movements kept us keenly interested. They seemed to disappear into space as much as into the water, so rapidly was it done. Then when we least expected it, one of them showed where there was no trace of winged creature an instant before. Their powers of remaining under the water, and of rapid motion there, were quite as wonderful. They must find their way through it as gracefully and easily as swallows wing the air.

Once the grebes showed themselves towards the narrower end of the loch. We followed in our boat, driving them up a long inlet to the place where a little stream entered. The birds themselves appeared to enter into the spirit of the sport, keeping to the inlet until we were well up it. Now they are fairly cornered, and we shall be able to examine them at our leisure. They cannot get out to the open without coming quite near the boat, and we are ready to splash the water and frighten them back as soon as they make the attempt. One of us is watching from the prow with all the excitement of bright boyhood, and other two have each an oar. Gently along, and keep your eyes on them. There

they both are, by the mouth of the stream, watching us closely with their furtive, rapidly moving eyes. They can never get past us without taking to flight. Yes! they can; it has been bird wit to man wit, and we have been fairly outwitted. One quick decisive look, then a long dive, and almost right under the boat, in spite of all our splashing, they have both of them escaped. Some minutes afterwards, their half-laughing, derisive calls are heard from the open water.

A pair of crested grebes come every spring to each of the three lochs for nesting, and leave again in autumn. Very few parts of the country can show so many of them within so limited a space. Strange birds, they afford a never-failing interest to the lover of bird life. They have an old-world appearance, a half-reptilic air, as if they had survived from a measureless past.

Little grebes had also come on our earlier visit to the loch, and were diving and uttering their fainter but more musical cry. Like the other birds, they were preparing for the coming nesting season, though it was weeks too early for the reedy shelter which the waterfowl love.

By a grassy promontory that reached out into the water we got our first and only pike. A dead strain, and then he came quietly ashore, a beauty of his kind, between one and two pounds. Well-shaped, as he lay on the soft moss, bright yellow markings relieved the darker ground-colour of his body, and

the fins were covered with rich brown spots. Only one other fish touched us, though we used the most tempting of all bait—part of the fish we had caught. With this quantities of pike are got from the loch in the closing months of the year; sometimes the fisherman has a larger catch than he can carry home. Excellent perch, too, are caught from the boat, many of them scaling two pounds.

As the sun passed over the wooded hollow, the day got too cold for fishing. We left at last with an almost empty basket. But no day is lost that has been spent with nature, she has so many wonders to show the eye that she has opened to see them, and exercises so many influences to elevate the life.

We must come again when the trees are in leaf, and the slopes beneath them are bright with summer flowers. If the fish are not moving, we shall have more time for a pleasant chat with the keeper on his cottage bench. He will tell us about the wild creatures that he has seen on his daily rounds, and the birds that visit the loch in the course of the year. His boat is at our service, to drift round the reeds where the lily grows, until the blackbird has begun his vesper hymn and the soft beams of sunset are lingering to touch the tops of the trees.

QUIET WATERS.

THE nearest loch of all was a favourite place of resort in leisured hours. Its waters are the centre of many memories. I can reproduce every curve and line that bounded it, as clearly as if I were looking on them, in quiet moments of thought. Perhaps it was the fact that so many wild creatures visited it that drew my own steps, or it may have been the same cause brought every one of us,—the mysterious influence which water in all its forms, as sea, or stream, or loch, has for life. In any case I have visited it many a time and at every season of the year,—when the surface waters were bound fast with ice, and the winged fowl sat disconsolately with buried head in the centre; when the reed armies sent up their green pointed spears from the depths beneath; when the lily and the yellow iris were in flower, or the tall grasses withered and fell again before the cold breath of approaching winter. I have mental pictures of the loch in all its phases: they have a place to themselves in the inner gallery that life has made for me. Looking at them

now, with many miles between, they mean more than any canvas that world-renowned artist has ever painted. The pictures that life paints for us are those that appeal to the heart.

The best point of view for the loch is a piece of rising ground towards the upper end. In summer, bird's-foot trefoil carpets its slopes with patches of bright colour, and wild thyme scents the air. Rank bushes of broom conceal it from the road that passes the side of the loch. From this spot better than anywhere, with an ordinary field-glass the eye can sweep the surface of the water and distinguish the birds that are floating on it.

Along its whole length the loch lies between road and railway, that almost touch it as they pass on either side. Some buildings, showing between the trees, are part of a station, the outlet for the traffic of a wide, agricultural district. But the birds have grown familiar with the passing trains: from the carriage windows they may be seen best of all. Wild bird and beast that are very shy of man when he is afoot will show hardly any fear of a passing vehicle full of people. This may be easily put to the test from a trap driven through a country where there is abundance of game. The surface extent of the loch, too, gives the shyest fowl a sense of security, and, for its size, the amount of reedy cover makes it the most frequented of them all. So here, if anywhere in the district, the rarer waterfowl are most likely to be seen.

Very few of the birds that visit it make the loch their home all the year. Most of them stay for a few months; some are casual visitants, using it as a resting-place on their migratory flights. In winter there are more birds, and a greater variety of them as well.

A very prevalent opinion among the people around is that the lochs lie in the channel of an old river flowing eastward to the sea. However this may be, they once extended much farther east: there is a place in the parish a mile or more from them still known as Lochside. A wide, fertile valley reaches from the lochs to the coast, and right east of them is an inlet of the sea visited at times by many strange fowl. Up the valley some of them come, descending to alight on these inner reaches of water, and any one who makes their bird life a study in the winter months, and especially towards spring, will be able to record some very interesting kinds.

Divers visit the loch by the station—both red- and black-throated—though they never stay. Other seabirds come—gulls, mergansers, and an occasional wild swan. The note of a strange wader is sometimes heard from the passing road.

But, for a lover of bird life, it is the duck tribe that give its greatest interest to the loch. All the different kinds of our country that visit fresh water are represented at one time or another. Widgeon, pintail, scaup have been observed, and one winter

some rarer smew-duck frequented the loch. Of other duck there is no lack through the winter,—mallard, teal, tufted, golden-eye, pochard,—and all of these, with the exception of the golden-eye, remain to nest among the rushes. The drakes—often three or four species together—in their breeding plumage, floating outside the margin of reeds, are a beautiful sight. Tufted duck—the males at least—and golden-eye are very much alike at a distance on the water; but the latter show more white, and on the wing may be recognised at once. Each duck has its own note, from the harsh, croaking call of the tufted to the melodious whistle of the teal.

Out from our resting-place the pair of crested grebes that come to this loch season by season are often in evidence. They nest in the reeds beneath, and without a boat no one can disturb the sitting female bird. When the young are hatched they swim and dive about the parents, or climb between their wings for a rest to be borne about the loch. Very proud parents the old birds appear to be, and very devoted to their growing brood.

Swallows, every springtime, appear first by the lochs. There you may note them a full week before they have sought their old haunts. They rest from their long journey, and find food and shelter when chill winds are still sweeping over the country. All summer the swallow frequents the loch, gliding and doubling above its surface.

Higher in the air large numbers of swifts play and feed through the long summer twilight: I have seen more than a hundred of these birds together, when passing on the road.

Westward from the loch is marshy ground. Snipe nest among the rushes, and *drum* in spring in the air overhead. Often three or four birds are making their drumming sound together. It is a pleasant note to the ear, rising and falling like the hum of a threshing-mill among the sheaves. Each bird mounts in circles or in a slanting upward flight, so high at times that it is but a speck, and then passes rapidly down through the air again with spread tail and wing. It is during this descending flight that the sound is heard from the rapid motion of the bird's stiffer feathers. Again and again the snipe makes it, circling and rising a longer or shorter way. Some continue in the air a considerable time, alighting among the rushes for a short rest, and then remounting to repeat the humming note. It carries a long way, and, on still evenings, near the marsh the whole air thrills with it, as the happy musicians cross and recross each other's devious paths high above. The sound may be made out of rivalry, but, like the bird's song, it appears rather to come out of the joyous fulness of the minstrel's heart. Redshanks play by the loch in the same way, rising into the air with a soft, melodious *tu-tu-tu*, though they do not, very audibly at least, make the humming noise of the snipe.

One of the pleasantest seasons to visit the loch are the long, cool hours of a summer evening. A great many of the waterfowl have brought out their young from the heaped-up nests among the reeds; over the wide surface of the loch are old birds with a family of little, black, downy creatures swimming around them. Now the happy note of motherhood is often heard. As we watch them, the song of the sedge-warbler rises from the reeds, and the *ching, ching, chinging* note of the reed-sparrow.

Trains rush past, hurrying across an open space between an embankment and a small plantation. They do not introduce a discordant note: with the birds, the heart finds in them another manifestation of the fulness of life. They come into sight for a moment, and then disappear behind the trees. There is something which suggests the immaterial about this rapidity of motion that carries them so fast out of sight: the flying trains rushing past the loch are impressions, thoughts, and little more.

Right beneath us the reeds grow most densely, a jungle of sedges and plumed grasses rising high above the water. Among them the moorhen *curks* incessantly, and the shy water-rail slips silently. The thick cover affords the young birds perfect security from the approach of enemies on the land side or the air above: their worst danger is the voracious pike lurking still as a log on the outside edge of the reeds.

Close to the reeds water-lilies grow in great

abundance, both white and yellow, hiding parts of the water with flower and leaf. Along the opposite edge white lilies form a gleaming border against the glossy green. Round one inlet they are almost within reach of the hand, and the large, thick stems show through the clear water like branches of submerged trees. They are not meant to be plucked though they are so beautiful; they want breadth of water and wild surroundings to give their beauty effect. No flower is so disappointing as a water-lily when cut; even in ponds and artificial reaches of water, where man has planted it, both flower and leaf lose all their wild beauty, and appear poor, stunted things. There are plants, as there are animals, that allow man to tame them, and adapt themselves to their new surroundings; but others, as the lily, pine and die whenever they are taken from their native place. So we shall let the eye feast on them where they grow, and lighten the shadowy places of the loch, under the lofty reeds. Others will rejoice over them as we have done, and find them no less lovely because our heart has gathered their beauty to be a perpetual possession in the days to come. They may brighten some reach of life where the shadow falls, as to-day they brighten the dark, muddy places of the loch along the margin of the reeds.

Large spearwort rises high among the grasses, and its golden flowers gleam through them on every side. The smaller kind is more plentiful still, where little

waterways reach out from the loch among bog-myrtle and willows. All the lochs have a flora of their own as varied as their bird life; but some of the less common plants are as difficult to get at as the water-lilies. There are quaking bogs that make the searcher step carefully, feeling for the firmer tussocks, and deep pools almost hidden in rushes and sedges.

So one must be an enthusiast to exhaust the plant life of the lochs. As many as seventeen or eighteen recognised species and varieties of pond-weed have been got, from the common broad-leaved to the rarer fennel-leaved kind. There is a great variety of sedges which none but a botanist can distinguish. Some of the smaller pools near the loch across the railway have stray plants of water-soldier, and tufted myosotis grows by the one at our feet. But these must be closely searched for; so must the bladder-worts, the starworts, and others as seldom found, though the search always increases the joy of a find. At the same time other interesting facts are learned about the many-sided life of the lochs, and the habits of their creatures, that the casual passer-by never sees.

All the summer starlings roost every night in the reed-beds. Before the end of the season their numbers are countless. Towards sunset, and for an hour later, they come in flocks of varying sizes, from a few to thousands. Miles away in the surrounding country they may be noted at nightfall making for

their roosting-place. If disturbed when most of them have settled, they rise from the reeds with a deafening rush of wings. Some trees near grow black with their numbers, and many of the branches bend almost to breaking beneath the solid weight of birds. By-and-by they return to the reeds, a noisy crowd, and their shrill twittering lasts late into the night.

With the starlings, swallows share the reedy shelter for a roosting-place, mostly young at first, but later in the year old and young together. They, too, play above the reeds on autumn evenings in immense numbers. The last swallow of the year is as likely to be seen by the loch as the first one. When they have left with the browning reeds, the waterfowl from the north are streaming back to their old winter haunts.

PROMISE OF SUMMER.

LARGE rounded white clouds drift slowly across the sky. Larger at the horizon, as they advance little shreds and curls of vapour detach themselves from their edges and gradually disappear in the background of blue. The sun's disc is visible through them, and when they pass he shines more brightly on fresh green meadow and ploughed field. From all the land comes the joy of promise, the opening flush of new-born life. Nature reveals and expresses the heart's own deep gladness. The throbbing melody of the bird's song, the rich beauty of flower and leaf, the drifting clouds, —heaven's white-sailed argosies,—the sunny glance of the stream, like the glad light from a happy face, are just the joy of the heart finding expression. Through the sweet sympathy of nature man enters into the old gladness of creation. She is the great psalm, the divine dream of love and beauty that has lain in his heart so long.

Greens and browns are the prevailing colours from meadow, woodland, and bare soil. A few seagulls show as white spots against a dark, ploughed field.

As soon as the ploughman begins his work they follow him, settling fearlessly behind the plough. With the rooks, they are the farmer's best friends at this season, devouring quantities of noxious grubs that have survived the winter's frost, and, but for these birds, would work irreparable damage to the young crops. Each plough has its own attendant company of gulls—common, herring, and occasionally a pair of the lesser black-backed kind. In large flights they come inland every morning, spreading over the country, and at sunset return to their roosting-places among the rocks. They circle, as they fly seawards, with wide easy sweep of wing. Small flocks and single birds pass overhead, sailing round and round in a series of ever-advancing, graceful aerial motions that soon carry them out of sight. Some evenings they ascend to a great height, and continue circling over one place in the manner of rooks above their rookery. They rise so high that they are just visible, and yet across this distance, in the calm evening air, the shrill wailing cry of the seagull easily carries. Underneath a dark background of cloud, now apparently vanishing into it, now silvery white in the last soft beams from the west, far above the brown fields, where the plough is lying by the finished furrow, the circling seagulls make part of the charm of a spring evening. Their wild cries give a pungent flavour of the briny waves to softer inland sounds. The sun has long set before the last loitering seagull has left the fields.

Late in April come the first swallows. Only so far is the date of their arrival dependent on the season. Bird and wild flower appear year after year with marvellous regularity. You can tell almost to a day, in an ordinary season, when the first butterbur or celandine will appear by the stream, or the colts-foot flower on the railway embankment; when the swallow will glide through the sunny air, or the willow-wren sing from the leafing tree. Through some subtler sense you become aware of their presence before you have seen or heard them, and there, as if a wish had drawn it out of the ground, is the wild flower, and above you in the air, with pleasant *twit*, a swallow passes the houses.

All the long dreary winter is at once forgotten with the return of the swallow: the sense of expectancy makes him fit into the scene as familiarly as if he had been absent but for a day. The local papers note the coming of the first one as a fact of general interest, and each place vies with another for the earliest record of the bird's arrival. Most years they appear with us about the 20th of April. By the first week of May sand- and house-martin, barn-swallow and swift, have all returned.

The popular mind does not readily discriminate between these different kinds: one name covers them all. In this more general sense the swallow is the only bird that seriously disputes the redbreast's place of supremacy in the heart. One is the home-bird of summer as the other is of winter. Both

barn-swallow and house-martin seek the immediate neighbourhood of man; they claim his friendship and protection by their almost perfect trust. No birds are so much in evidence during the summer months. Others seek the dense covert of the leaves, and nesting cares keep them more out of sight, but swallows love the open air where the most unobservant cannot help seeing them. Then their rapid powers of flight bring every part of a locality within easy reach of them, so that they are constantly seen. They scatter themselves like sunshine over the whole land, in city and country. Every farm around us has its own barn-swallows, often three or four pairs. All day long they wheel and glide about the steading, entering to their nests on the rafters wherever they find an opening. The farm hands do not disturb them, nor the rattling carts, nor the noisy children playing by the farmyard courts, but a passing dog or cat will bring a swallow down with threatening swoop, to shriek its noisy resentment.

Let the barn-swallow get but the merest pretence of a nesting-place in any out-building, and where will it not come. The humble cartshed is a favoured spot; so are the carpenters' wooden houses where the busy sawmill makes its whirring noise all the day. One summer a pair found entrance into church itself through a window that had been left open, and, before they were discovered, had almost finished their muddy shell of a nest on a projection near the roof. Be it house-martin or barn-swallow, every-

where the bird is treated with tender regard,—its delicate beauty and graceful flight, its perfect harmlessness, and, most of all, its happy confidence in him, make it one of man's sacred birds. Country people regard a pair of nesting swallows as if they were the good genii of the house. Sand-martins are less in evidence, but several small colonies burrow in the quarry banks around, and a number of swifts have made their home in the crevices of a railway bridge.

All the other migrants return with the swallow. Silently they appear in the old places, and each one as it comes helps to swell the chorus of summer. The warblers sing their brightest songs from bush and tree; cuckoos call on the moor from early morn till late at night; the corncrake *crexes* in the hayfield; above the loose stone wall a dainty wheatear wantons for very joy of life. They are all in accord with the beauty about them—sunshine and blue cloud-flecked sky, green leaf and delicately petalled flower,—poet voices that give it a fuller meaning for the heart.

The grass is not long enough to hide the hares. Tamer than at other seasons, they frolic in the fields under the intoxication of the new life. Towards sunset many of them steal along the hedges from moorland waste and woodland to feed in the fresh young grass. Some of our larger fields have six or even eight within a short distance of one another. Near the fence that divides a young plantation from one field, their runs are as well defined as sheep-paths, and tufts of woolly fur, rubbed off by wire

and bushes, lie thickly strewn about. Most of these the birds will carry away to make a warm lining for their nests.

With the approach of summer one loves to walk again by the bank of the stream in the grey light of the lengthening evening. The water-voles are a constant source of interest; before the grass has grown tall enough to hide them they are seen better than at any time. When the hares are feeding in the fields, they sit and nibble plant roots or grasses near their burrows. You have to step quietly, for they are both sharp-sighted and keen-eared, and often enough a sudden plump in the water is the only trace of their presence. But, now and again, one swimming in a calm pool or sitting upright on a little promontory—its food held in the forefeet—is as pretty a study of animal life as could be wished. They are the beavers of our streams: their rounded plumpness and soft glossy fur that varies in different voles from brown to velvety black, as well as their general habits, make them quite beaver-like in appearance.

A tree is a beautiful object in nature at any time, when the dense foliage of summer clothes it or the leaflessness of winter reveals more of its inner character. But now the trees show to best advantage with stem and branches still relieving the green of the opening leaves. Half-concealed, half-revealed amid this early verdure, each tree has a gracefulness and beauty that is beyond description.

The wild flowers open their petals in fast-increasing numbers to the growing light. A wooded knoll near the brook that joins the stream, above the village whose church spire rises over the fields, is blue with wild hyacinths; they have made the shadow under the beech-trees luminous. There is a tradition that this knoll was once the gallow hill of the old grey castle above it. But dreaming among the bluebells, the mind has no power to reproduce the dark fancies of a cruel past. The present alone fills it—green canopy of leaves, and blue sheen of countless flowers dappled with light and shadow, as if heaven and earth had changed places, bright sunshine outside, and summer breeze ruffling the brook into glancing ripples.

The earlier hosts of celandine are reduced to a few blanched flowers, but the oak wood near the mill is flushed rosy and white, under the leafless trees, with anemones. Blue dog-violets grow among them in the mossed grass as well as pale primroses. The first violets of the year open on a sunny sloping bank sheltered from the north by the beech hedge of a moorland cottage garden. Here they are often a full week earlier than elsewhere.

As the swallow is the harbinger of summer, so is the dog-violet of the swallow. Whenever it appears, the bird, responsive to the same influences, is close at hand. Like the swallow, too, the violet spreads over all the land, and each year brings the dweller in the country an ever new delight. Primroses and

wind anemones are more local flowers; they love the retirement of lonely glen and wooded slope. You must seek their haunts to enjoy their beauty. But the little dog-violet comes to man: it seems to flower for a human eye. By the most frequented way, wherever there is a waste bank, it springs up. Following in man's footsteps, but neither loud-voiced nor obtrusive in any way, the dog-violet never loses its modest charm. It seeks to make the traveller forget his weariness, and to rejoice him on his road, and yet, as one that does a good deed by stealth, half shrinks from recognition into the lengthening grass, or under the shadow of a covering bush.

As trees that have been blighted by a thunderbolt, some of last year's taller wild flowers—thistles, hard-heads, ragwort, meadow-sweet—still lift up their lifeless stems. But a new luxuriance of plant life is rising fast to hide every trace of past ruin and decay. Vetches, buttercups, and all the June flowers are pressing their way through the earth. The life tide is rising everywhere, as tides rise in the ocean. Tree, plant, and conscious living creature respond to the vital energy that pulses through them. The everlasting miracle is being repeated; from the old a new world is born; the whole land is throbbing with the promise of summer, and nature hurrying on to the purpose of another year.

AN OLD FOREST.

I.

DETACHED portions of moorland are found among the fields of the parish. In summer they afford pasturage for cattle and sheep from the neighbouring farms; otherwise man has left them to nature, for the soil is too poor for the plough. Heath, furze, birch, alder, and fir trees grow in them. These uncultivated wastes are a sanctuary of wild life, and from them in the evening the hare steals to the young grass. They mark older and wider limits of the great moor. Behind the parish it reaches still over a wide extent of country, the larger part well wooded with firs, larches, and a few other trees. Older people of the past generation remembered when this wood was young, but there have been forest and moorland through many centuries. The surface-soil of the moor consists of clays, gravels, and peaty formations, resting directly on the Old Red Sandstone. In some parts the trees are small and stunted, thickly coated with lichens; but, where

the mould is deeper and more kindly, very large and well-shaped firs and larches grow.

Stone weapons are sometimes found in the moor —the earliest traces of man's connection with it. Not long since a smooth and beautiful celt, perfect but for a small fracture in the cutting edge, was found beneath the upturned root of a wind-blown tree. How many years did the old stone weapon represent in the unwritten history of the moor? What was its long-forgotten owner? Was he hunter following the chase, or warrier shouting his wild battle-cry? What tale of olden times lay hid in it? The fractured relic was dumb to all the questions that crowded upon the mind. The very race to which its owner belonged has been forgotten. It might have fallen to earth, for all we know of it, from another world. A little bit of human flotsam, it had drifted from mysterious depths in the ocean of bygone time.

The Romans have contributed a later chapter to the lost annals of the moor. The disciplined tramp of their heavy legions has been often heard on it. In the country about are well-marked traces of the old, aggressive power of Rome. The rampart and ditch, with a gateway of an ancient camp, are to be seen in a part of the parish eight miles away. A road from it led westward, and a little village on this road, quite close to the camp, bears the name of Whig Street. Another camp, known to those who live near as Battledykes, lies within the ancient limits of the forest to which the moor once be-

longed. Roman roads crossed it, leading to the higher country on the northern side.

In one small part, enclosed from the rest of the moor, is a spring of water, known as the Battle Well. Here rhododendron bushes have grown rankly, and a wooden seat under the shelter of overhanging trees gives pleasant rest and shade. It is a peaceful spot, yet round the well with its crystal bubbling water gather traditions of bloody battle. Pict and Scot met in sanguinary conflict in a neighbouring parish. They have marched over it if they did not fight this great battle on the moor. Some mounded heaps by the edge of it may belong to the same period. The Dane has crossed the moor, coming from the sea on his raid of blood and fire. A Danish army was defeated near the coast some miles to the south. All the country between the moor and the scene of battle is strewn with Danish graves. One large detachment of the beaten foe, marching inland, was cut to pieces on the farther side of the moor.

The sounds of battle are ceased. Pict and Scot have become one people. The spoiler no more comes from the way of the sea. There are larger rents now in the veil that covers this later chapter of the ancient history of the moor. With the surrounding lands it is part of an extensive royal forest. There are really several forests, and their boundaries may yet be read in long-preserved documents, but so near that they are practically one. All this

afforested country is a royal reservation, one of those tracts that the sovereigns of the land once kept in their own hands for hunting purposes. Here they came from cares of State to hunt the creatures of the forest. There was an element of danger in the chase that chimed with the spirit of these hardy times, for wild boar and wolf haunted the forest depths as well as the fleet red-deer. So thickly wooded was the country around that, according to the old saying, for seven miles a wild cat could traverse it, leaping from tree to tree.

No great distance from the forest William the Lion had a castle by the seashore. On a grassy knoll its ruins stand, the lofty red walls, with the strength of the rocks, lifting up their weathered fronts to the eastern blast. They are storm and strife turned into stone, though on a summer day, when the sea is gleaming in the sunshine and the faint rush of the wavelets on the sands beneath just breaks the silence, the rugged old castle takes a tenderer tone. Other two royal castles stood by the lochs to the west, but all direct trace of them has vanished. A road reached from them to the coast—the cadger's road—by which the produce of the sea was brought to the king's table.

Some of the place-names about recall the old hunting times when kings visited the forest in quest of game. A charter remains from Bruce's day appointing a family of Tulloch hereditary keepers of the forest. As late as 1617 James VI. came to

hunt in it. By his time the old forest had shrunk to the extent of the present moor or little more. The royal castles had long ceased to be inhabited. King James was the guest of one of his nobles in another large castle on the eastern side of the moor. So greatly was he delighted with his hunting that he proposed to pay a second visit in 1621. With this intention he intimated the Earl of March, Treasurer of Scotland, to forbid all hunting, tillage, or cutting of turf in any part of the forest. But this second hunting expedition was never carried out. Some years later a local historian speaks of it as great and spacious, and as abounding in wild-fowl and hares. By his time the life of the moor was very much what it is now, though hares affect the detached portions of moorland among the fields more, and are rarely seen in the forest.

But very few details have been preserved of its earlier history. Vague traditions, for most part, are all that have come down to us, a word here and there from the blotted pages of the past. To study its ancient annals to best purpose you must go to the moor. You must rest in the long heather and hear the soft swish of the wind in the trees. The world outside is forgotten; all the busy fret and care of human life are left behind. Nature opens her great heart to receive you; she makes you one with everything around. The wild creatures cease to regard you as an intruder. A wood-grouse flutters down an avenue with heavy sidelong flight. Two roe-deer

are sauntering through the heather, and one of them lifts its antlered head to pluck some lichen from a larch-tree. The harsh *quaigh* of a heron falls on the ear, and the hard *croak* of a passing grey crow. Small birds call and twitter, and mice are rustling in the benty grass at your feet. Under the lofty branches of the firs the air is alive with humming insects.

Gradually the mind loses direct consciousness of these woodland sounds. They are but ripples that break the timeless calm of nature in the wood. The background of deep stillness overpowers them as the sunshine puts out a taper light. Wrapped in this timeless calm, the past comes to the heart as dreams come to sleep. The skin-clad men of the old stone age live again. The tramp of the heavy legionaries re-echoes from the long straight road among the trees. Round the Battle Well armies are contending with clash of weapons and cries of wounded men. The raven flag of the Norseman waves its dark folds amid the shadows. Wild creatures of the chase flee before the huntsman. All the forgotten past of the moor lives again. Scene by scene it steals over the soul as dreams visit sleep.

II.

More than a century ago what remained of the old moor from the encroachments of cultivation

was divided among the surrounding landowners. These have left the soil very much as it was given them, finding it more valuable for game and timber. The terrible November gale of 1893 sorely devastated the moorland trees. Another storm of wind a few weeks later overturned those whose roots were shaken, and in many places the fall was greater than in the first tempest, though the wind was much less boisterous. Some tinkers encamped in the wood at the time of the earlier gale sought safety in an opener part. "It was fair awful," one of them afterwards said, by way of summing up his experiences of that destructive night. So it must have been, with the roar of the tempest coming in resistless gusts on the devoted wood, the straining and groaning of yielding tree trunks, the snapping and crashing of large branches whirled past on the blast, more awe-inspiring for the darkness of the night.

The two gales almost ruined some of the fairest parts of the country around. In many places wide lanes were cut through the moor; every tree was overturned in them; man himself could hardly have done it more regularly. Parts of it that had been deep in shadow on the sunniest day beneath an impenetrable cover of pine branches were open to the sky after the storm, as the fields outside. Fallen trees blocked every pathway, and made it very difficult to get any distance into the wood.

After that stormy winter timber became an

important industry of the district. Numbers of woodmen came to work in connection with temporary sawmills that were erected throughout the moor. There were ten mills at one time, and the last ones did not leave till three years after the storm. Barren patches, covered with sawdust, still mark the spots where they stood. Comfortable wooden shanties were erected for some of the workmen on the moor. Huge piles of pine and larch logs accumulated at the nearest railway station, and carts and traction-engines were going and coming along the road all the day.

But one result of the storm was an immediate reduction of the market price of timber: the destruction had been very widespread. On the moor, at their first sale, large trees realised but a few pence a tree. The broken and lopped branches, known as hag, lay on the ground for a long time after the mills had been taken away. Men were employed to gather them into heaps, which were afterwards set fire to. Every year since the tree roots have formed an industry of their own; being highly resinous, they make excellent kindling wood. They are dug out and carted away to be made into fagots that are sold in the nearer towns.

Woodland fires have broken out, through accident, in several parts of the moor. One fire raged for two or three days, in spite of every effort to stay its progress. All day dense clouds of smoke lay over the burning wood. As evening deepened the effect

became far more weird and magnificent, long writhing tongues of flame rose high into the air, and there was a steady, deep, volcanic glow from the thick smoke clouds overhead. But gale and fire have helped only to make clearer the endless resources of the moorland wood. There is a marvellously recuperative power in nature; on the moor this power is fast hiding every ravage of the past.

The blown parts have become woodland glades and lanes where the heather grows more luxuriantly; nowhere does it bloom so richly or last so long. Cross- and smooth-leaved heaths, with rose and purple bells, flower early in summer; but it is the common heather in autumn that makes the most gorgeous display. There is no describing its surpassing beauty; the effect is greatly heightened in the wood. On the open moors great breadths of purple cloy at last: though beautiful, they become almost monotonous. But here, soft shadow, bright sunshine, and hazy light give impressive effect to every tint of purple, so that there is no monotony; and the broken gleams of bright colouring half-hidden among the trees give the imagination pleasure by new suggestions of beauty as well as the eye by what is seen. Perhaps the heather reaches its richest effect in the glades of the wood, where the purple glow is framed in a green setting of fir-trees, roofed with the hazy blue of the autumn sky. Travellers passing on the public road that crosses the moor unconsciously linger to enjoy its beauty.

Holiday-makers from the towns gather large bunches to carry home. All the fine season through, the moorland wood is a favourite picnic resort.

In places where the wood is opener, pines, alders, and some oaks grow singly—large and finely shaped trees. Rank tufts of rushes spring up from rich green woodland grass. Wandering roe-deer give a living interest to these park-like expanses: there is a wild charm and sense of freedom in them that the best artificial park can never give. Clear streams, abounding in small trout, cross the moor, babbling between their mossy banks; a heron or two are always to be seen by them. On the tree-clad slopes of their little valleys the brake-fern grows tall and rank, concealing beneath its broad leaves another world of busy life. Wherever you care to wander, some interesting bit of forest scenery meets you: there is no end to the rich variety nature provides in the wood.

Tinkers constantly camp on the moor; they have come to it time out of mind. They use different parts of it, often the end of an old avenue close to a road. But the spot that they frequent most of all is near one edge of the wood: here a thick growth of spruce-trees gives them shelter from the colder winds. In winter the little tents—a hooped stick or two with their extremities firmly planted in the ground, and old canvas stretched over them—are protected, besides, by a breastwork of branches piled up around them. The gamekeeper has no love for

the tinkers, and is not slow to express his thoughts; but he lets them alone on the tacit understanding that they do not touch the game. With the homesteads near their encampment they are on friendly terms. Many have come so long that they are well known, and, apart from turns of hard drinking, are quiet and inoffensive. The tinkers do all in their power to cultivate the friendly feeling of the neighbourhood, it means so much to them; they receive many kindly services, especially when any of them are ill. For these they are very grateful, asking the goodwife if she has anything they can mend for her.

A visit to the tinkers is always full of interest. One day we went to see them by special invitation. The father of one tent, a middle-aged man, was quite voluble. He had travelled over a great part of the country. There was no gipsy blood in him, but he had often met real gipsies and knew some Romany words. Horn spoons, he said, were once a common article of manufacture by people like himself, and sold in country places. One of his sons was a soldier in India. His children never had any school education. Neither had they ever been in church, but they said their prayers, and sang little bits of hymns. Four people slept together in his tent, lying on heather and straw. The stout canvas kept out rain and snow. So on he talked fast, working at a tin lid. He seemed perfectly happy.

"It's a dreadful life for your girls."

"Oh," evasively, "I couldna wint my lassies."

"But isn't it a very hard life for yourself in winter?"

"It's no sae guid then, but think of it in simmer; it's better than the life o' ony gintleman."

What more could be said to such a self-satisfied philosopher? His life has large compensations for its more disagreeable side. That night, at least, in the deep restfulness of such a peaceful spot, with the mild air, and the moving shadows, and the cloud-flecked heavens, it was easier to understand the tinker's love for the wood.

Another family was busy basket-making; and some distance away, by the side of an avenue, was a solitary tent with two inmates sitting by the door—a hard-featured woman and a prepossessing young girl. They, too, were glad to talk with us about the places where they had been. There was a frankness and a natural courtesy about them that seemed to belong to a different class, and one could not help feeling sorry for the girl, with all the temptations and dangers of her wandering life, as she nodded her pleasant good-night.

One year a baby was born at Christmas in the wood. Though the weather felt cold and stormy, the mother was very unwilling to leave her wretched tent for the temporary shelter of a poorhouse in the town. Occasionally one of the tinker children is brought to the manse for baptism. One mother came alone with her child; it was a weakly creature, and she was very anxious to have it baptised. The

father was doing militia duty at the time some distance away. She sat very reverently through the short service, constantly ejaculating "Amen." When it was done, she seemed very grateful; but her thoughts of the religious aspect of baptism were rather vague, though they were full of a love and tender anxiety for the child that gave them a sacredness of their own. "Thank ye kindly, sir," were her last words; "we aye think they thrive better efter."

Poor people, too, come from the town to camp in the moor, part of the summer. It saves rent, and they enjoy the wild, free life. Before the close of the season some of them cut bunches of heather for making strong brooms to sell in town.

III.

The larches are in the first rich flush of summer. The effect of their vivid green is increased by the darker hues of the fir-trees about them. They seem to glow with their new life, and to warm the colder tints of the wood, like gleams of sunshine in the midst of shadow. From the grass by the stream and along the pathway comes another bright green of summer, a shade deeper than the green of the larches.

Where the avenue crosses the stream is a typical woodland bridge. Five or six rounded beams have

been made to span the banks. On these, slenderer larch poles are laid lengthways with the stream, and covered with thick green turf. The constant passage of heavy cartloads of wood has welded the parts together, and it feels firm to the foot as a bridge of stone.

There is a dearth of wild flowers in the wood. Dog-violets grow along the avenue, and in a moist hollow where the cart tracks have cut deep into the soft soil are the smaller light-pink flowers of the marsh violet. Bugle leaves are fairly plentiful, though the plant will not flower for a week or two yet. On the banks of the stream, and in its quiet reaches, spearwort, wild mint, and horsetails grow. Then you may find, in their season, sneezewort, scorpion grass, devil's-bit scabious, and in a quiet pond deep in shadow, pond-weed with abundance of pennywort leaves round the moist edges. Besides these, there are a few more kinds—tormentil making parts yellow in late summer, and marsh thistles lifting their stems high above the rushes; but the flora of the large one is very scanty, and not in any way to be compared with that of the smaller and less wooded moors.

The notes of a cuckoo are almost startling in their clearness. Again and again, rapidly repeated, they break the stillness, and then end with a rapid *cuck*. Presently the bluish back of the bird is visible as it hurries hawk-like across an open part of the wood.

Somewhere near a redstart is singing his short,

weak song. His brilliant colours make him difficult to be seen in the bright sunshine; but at last the eye catches him high up on the broken branch of a larch-tree. There is little variety in his hurried notes, yet they have a pleasant woodland flavour, and, like the song of the chaffinch, suggest babbling water. The redstart has the restless habits of the warbler kind: he has a way all his own, too, of making the crimson feathers of the tail quiver with a rapid vibratory motion. On the moor he is quite common, two or three birds singing within hearing at once, on a bright June day; but, strangely enough, in the woodland parts of the parish, and the beech woods immediately to the south, though they abound in haunts that the bird loves, a redstart is seldom if ever seen.

Black-game and wood-grouse fly from the trees before us as we go farther into the wood. It is their nesting season, and most of the birds are males. They have been feeding on the tender green larch tips. A few more rise from the heather with heavy, noisy flight. The glossy blackcock is fairly abundant: often in the autumn stubble outside flocks of twenty or more may be seen. The sportsman hides himself carefully in the line of their flight, but only at rare intervals does he get a shot at the wary birds, and a brace of black-game brought down in this way is a sporting feat. The males have their play-places where they gather on spring mornings. Often the forester has seen them as he pro-

ceeded to his work when the first sunbeams were finding their way among the trees. He remembers, too, when jays were plentiful. The last of them were poisoned a good few years ago, and now, over a wide stretch of country about, the jay is never seen.

We have got very close to one or two capercailzie. What magnificent birds they are, with their great size and rich, dark-brown, shining tints! The whiskered tufts of feathers on the neck show out as the bird flies rapidly away. There are a great many of their nests: last visit we saw one close by the path. Under a spruce-tree two or three fallen branches lay on the ground, and beneath the shelter of one of them the nest had been made. The hen bird was sitting: she let us come so near that we could see the rich pencilling on the grey back and breast and the lovely ruddy tints of the neck. At last, realising that she was seen, she rose and flew a short way into the wood. The nest was roughly made, a slight depression in the ground, lined with heather, moss, and lichen. In it lay eight strangely varied eggs. Two were a dirty white without any other markings; the rest had a rich yellowish-brown colour, speckled all over with deeper brown streaks and spots. Some capercailzie eggs were taken to a cottage near the wood one season and put under a domestic fowl. The young birds hatched safely, but immediately afterwards wandered away.

Red-grouse have been introduced into the moor. There is a covey or two in the opener heather, but

they do not seem to increase fast. There is too much wood for them, and probably many of the birds leave for the hills and wider moors to the north.

Broken shells of eggs are found in the nesting season close to the avenues. This is the work of grey crows: they plunder the nests of capercailzie and other birds of the wood whenever they get a chance. The gamekeeper retaliates by sending shot through every nest he finds. But their hard *croak* is always a familiar sound, and with the extent of the moor, the height of many of the thickly branched fir-trees, and the birds' own natural cunning, sharpened by generations of proscription, grey crows will be common for many years to come.

All through the wood curlews have been calling; every spring they come in large numbers. Each opening among the trees has its own pair, and there is no getting past them without a noisy alarm. Watchers of game must find the bird a helpful ally: it is always easy to know by the curlew's cry if intruders are about. Rabbits and other wild creatures, in the same way, by the sense of security they show or their signs of alarm, give a world of information to a trained woodland eye.

But here we have come to a very thick part of the wood. Away from the avenue it is difficult making a path through the trees. From the side of a small pond in a hollow several herons have risen with harsh *quaighs*. They must often come,

for their light-blue feathers are scattered around. Not far away is a heronry, the nests high up on slender-stemmed fir-trees. Some greenish egg-shells lie on the ground, and weak sounds are made by the young in the large nests above. The old ones, circling high in the air, utter their harsh cries. There are only a few nests yet; the first birds came from the deer-park of the large castle beyond the wood; but, if unmolested, they will increase rapidly. The moor secures perfect quiet for them, and in its streams there is plenty of food.

We are out in the open at last, where the evening sunshine gleams pleasantly on the Red Den stream. Along it the primroses are still in flower, under trees and bushes, on the level sward, and in every cranny of the bank. Some, bending daintily over the stream as if to look at their own loveliness, are reflected in the clear water. With the fast-waning afternoon the orange light of sunset casts long beams between the trees. A little way off it passes into faint purples; earth is clothed with airy textures of purple and gold. It is the transformation-scene of day, the summing up of all its beauty, to cast it again for one brief space over the world.

Where the stream passes a long-wooded mound another avenue returns, leading straight across the wood. The rugged stems of the fir-trees are ruddy in the passing light. Many of them appear cedar-like in their strength of stem and large expanse of sombre branches. Only give the fir-tree room to

assert its individuality and it becomes one of the most striking of trees, the embodiment of immense strength and forceful character. Weather-beaten, lichen-covered, like grey old castles that have grown stronger with the years, these fir-trees in the open are fit to resist any storm. Larches, with their superior height and slender branches, are more graceful, but they lack the character and robustness of the fir.

A large flock of ring-doves are returning to roost in the wood: something disturbs them, and they rise into the air again with a loud clapping of many wings. Roe-deer have begun to make their barking noise. It is their call to one another, for often, immediately after, there comes an answering call. One within sight is barking, lifting up its head every time, and proceeding towards a companion hidden in the wood. At one time the sound is almost musical—a sharp, shrill, terrier-like sound; at another, harsh and raucous, as if it came from a choking throat. The wood is, for the most part, in the hands of a noble proprietor, who is more interested in the ways of nature and her wild creatures than in sport. In his hands it has become a wide sanctuary for roe-deer: they are seldom disturbed, and very few shot. So they show unusual confidence for their kind, feeding often quite close to a well-frequented road.

Woodcock cross overhead in the gloaming. They, too, utter two notes—a shrill *tsirp*, which is their

best-known sound, and a lower croak. You must be very near to hear this last note, a kind of gurgling noise in the bird's throat.

But there is a strange sound in the wood to-night. It fills the mind to the exclusion of anything else. *Wooroo, wooroo,* a vibratory noise: it suggests giant frogs in a distant marsh, or a large flywheel rapidly rotating. *Wooroo, wooroo,* and by-and-by, as you approach in the direction of it, you hear other notes. *Wooroo put-a-put, wooroo, wooroo, wooroo put-a-put.* The whole wood is full of it, a strange, eerie, but fascinating sound. You follow it in the deepening twilight until a large capercailzie flutters from a tall tree, and there, for the time, the ghostly noise stops. It is this bird that is making it all over the wood, and if you could only see him, every feeling of awe would give place to amusement, for all the time the bird is swelling his throat, puffing out his feathers, and indulging in strange antics that are altogether out of keeping with his staid, majestic demeanour of the daytime. The sound begins after sunset, and lasts for almost an hour in the clear frosty afterglow of the evenings of the earlier year. Long after we have left the wood we can still hear it, and for days it repeats itself again and again in the mind.

THE QUARRY POOL.

ALL day the wind has been in the west, a nice, soft, rustling breeze, before which the young corn is bending in long wavy lines. Though the sun shines brightly—too brightly for fishing—there is a promise of later clouding, and we are going for the first cast of the season to the Quarry Pool. The fresh May afternoon is itself sufficient to send us out for the joy of a walk through the early summer fields, and the pool, with its trout, adds that element of purpose which increases so much the pleasure of such an outing.

It is the time of the year when spring and summer meet, the sweet seventeen of nature, the exquisite point of experience where promise begins to lose itself in fulfilment. The earlier burst of song has not yet spent itself; above the fields, as we pass through them, three or four larks are singing. There is no lack of them: every field of the parish in early summer has its singing larks. The popular impression that these birds are decreasing, and that the increase of the starling has something to do with it, does not find any support with us. No bird

has grown so plentiful in the neighbourhood as the starling; it nests everywhere, in ivied walls and under the eaves, in hollow trees and farmyard ricks. On autumn evenings large extents of grass and stubble are dark with clamorous birds, that gather in the fields before they rise to seek their nightly shelter. Here, if anywhere, our larks ought to decrease; but, despite the popular impression, they continue from year to year in undiminished, if not increasing, numbers.

Past some smaller tracts of moor along the rough, wet, moorland road our path leads us. It will not be dry for a month yet, and at one part, where a large pool of water has covered the clayey track, we have to walk on the steep, narrow bank, steadying our feet on the slope by clinging to the fence above. We are thankful enough to leave such precarious footing and take a pleasanter pathway through the moor on the left. Here we can linger —for it is a beautiful spot—to let the sun farther to the west, and enjoy the quiet charm of the scene. A clear, cold streamlet keeps singing to itself for very gladness of heart as it hurries glancing through the light shade of the alder-trees. Minnows dart about in the deeper pools, and several pairs of sticklebacks chase one another with rapid motions. Scentless dog-violets are flowering everywhere in the fresh green grass; near the trees, in moist ground, are smaller, delicately veined marsh ones. There is no end to the dog-violets; in some parts they cluster

into clumps and bouquets of blue. Soft light, leaf shadow flickering in the breeze, emerald grass, and blue violets make a beautiful symphony of summer. Outside the trees the moor is aglow with yellow blossom.

A little way farther the shadow grows deeper, where a path enters a clump of tall beeches. The light falling on so many young beech leaves, reflected from some, passing through the delicate transparency of others, has taken a sensible tone from them. The grass beneath increases the effect, so that the air about seems charged with green tints, as in a fairy grotto. No tree is more beautiful than the beech in early summer, with its smooth pillar of a trunk, its long, pliant branches ending in slender twigs, and its vivid green leafage. In it strength, delicacy, and beauty are combined more than in any tree. Under some beeches the ground has been littered with husks of last year's mast newly pushed off by the young lusty life. Looking up we can see some still left on the trees, though they are being rapidly hidden among the leaves. During the winter, when the sun lights up their sombre hues, the empty nut-cases might be four-petalled flowers growing on the leafless trees.

Beyond the beeches the mounded rubble of the quarries appears across the public road. The large heaps are covered about their bases and up part of their slopes with yellow broom. Nowhere does the broom grow more luxuriantly than by the old

quarries, and its golden sheen is visible a long way off. With it dog-roses have sprung up and formed large thorny brakes about the quarry pools; in another month their pink-and-white flowers will give another richness of colouring, not so vivid, but almost as lovely as it is now.

Pushing through the bushes, and climbing the slaty rubble, we have reached at last the largest pool. The wind is ruffling its surface into ideal fishing ripples, and a large cloud from the west has covered the sun. Every angler knows the pleasant thrill of expectancy that the sight of favourable fishing conditions produces. The hands cannot put the rod together quickly enough, nor tie to the cast with sufficient haste the suitable flies. We are on the right side of the pool for fishing. Almost everywhere else a steep bank rises out of unknown depths; but here the rubble slopes gently to the shore, and for several yards out the water is only a few feet deep. In one or two places floating pond-weed makes nice cover for trout. They are rising freely in the opener water, and close to the reeds a good trout has fixed, and rushes about at a great rate, leaping a foot above the surface to free himself from the troublesome fly. For a moment the heart feels the joy and fear of fishing; the tangled weed stems are the danger; if he get among them the fish has all the odds in his favour. But he is firmly hooked, and, after another wild rush or two, brought safe to land, a speckled beauty.

Another trout is caught on the other side of the weeds, not quite so large, and a few more farther round,—nine fish altogether.

The pool has two varieties, both well spotted, but one lighter and more silvery than the other. The explanation of the difference is that they were taken at first from different streams. In the still water of the old quarry they are not so firm-fleshed and good for eating as river trout. To-night we are satisfied with our hour's fishing, though we have not touched any of the monsters of the pool that lurk somewhere in the deeper reaches. Towards evening they may be seen at times swimming leisurely round the edges. More certain evidence that they are not a myth of the angling imagination, one is got at long intervals with minnow and worm: the last, caught by a boy from one of the cottages near, two or three weeks since, weighed odd ounces over four pounds. The very possibility of such a monster gives an increased relish to fishing in the larger pool, for your angler can derive pleasure from anticipation where it never gets so far as realisation, and an occasional trout will keep him going for long hours together with a sense of expectancy so keen that at every cast the eye almost sees a rising trout. These fish of the fancy are part of the day's sport as well as those he brings to his basket.

But the wind has died away, and though the trout are still breaking the water into ripples, the pool is much too calm for fishing. So we shall rest for a

time on some scanty turf that covers part of the dry stone rubble. A cuckoo is calling on the moor. The calm evening gives a deepened intensity to the sound, and each syllable rings out clear and distinct, *cuckoo*, fifteen times rapidly repeated.

At our feet the pool lies smooth and deep, reflecting from its broad surface the sky above. Martins dip their white breasts as they glide over the water; they have begun to nest under the low cottage eaves. On the lower side of the pool we can see a sandpiper running along the water edge, monotonously repeating its plaintive *peet, peet*. Somewhere near the female bird is sitting on her loose-built nest of moss and leaves, with its four, pointed, beautifully blotched eggs. In crannies of the broken stone pied wagtails build, and moorhens in the bushes and under shelter of the banks by the water.

The rubble heaps rise around us, shutting out the country on every side but the north, where the large, wooded moor fills the view. In the seclusion of the slate quarries the mind glides under the influence of the past. They belong to the Old Red Sandstone, and the millenniums that have passed since it was laid down in its depth of primeval waters fall away from thought as a dream. The little quarry pool expands on every side, to become part of an inland sea with strange fish. Large fossils have been found in the quarries, and the unquarried rock around us contains many more. There they lie for future ages to read and ponder—the deep yearning

of life for immortality imprinting itself then, as now, on stone.

Westward the sea extended, and a mile beyond the wood, in an exhausted quarry, smaller fossil fish were found — climatius, euthacanthus, and other little-known names. Towards the south, where the country rises in long swelling slopes, it shallowed, and there the fossils are those of the pterygotus, a great lobster-like creature that crept over the old-world slime. The curious may see them in a metropolitan museum.

To-night, with the spotted trout on the bank beside us and the living that swim in the quarry pool, the wheel of life seems to have come round to the same point again: the great circle is complete in the wonderful romance of creation. The spirit is happy with its own thoughts. For the time the unknown presents no perplexity. There is a subtle fascination about the scene that makes silence the highest measure of enjoyment. The world is shut out by the rubble heaps, the pine-clad moor, and the purple-tinted hills in the far distance. Everything helps to make a delightful Nirvana of existence, — no desire, no anxiety, no fear, only an infinite satisfaction with the deep joy of being.

But gradually human unrest reasserts itself. The spell of the past is broken. A large mound, where the broom grows rankest, calls us to climb its steeps for the view above. Round the end of the pool,

across the soft sward, yellow with lady's fingers and rapidly flowering bird's-foot trefoil, through brambles and raspberry bushes, up the abrupt stone heap, we have to force our way. The view from the summit is worth a much harder effort. Golden broom gleams from every side, golden broom by the wood, golden broom round the quarry pools and gilding the rugged heaps, — a golden splendour beyond the dreams of avarice. The cuckoo calls at intervals from the wood. A swift is hurrying past to one of the distant railway bridges, a dark streak on the evening sky. A delicate perfume of broom blossom fills the air. The wind has quite fallen; beneath us the quarry pools are lying, placid as mirrors. The larger one is a beautiful crimson, where the afterglow has reached it. Nature has turned the water into wine, reproducing the old miracle. Cirrus cloud and crimson light in a setting of golden broom,—it is earth's transformation scene on this glorious summer evening. Enjoyment of sense, and mind, and soul can go no further; we gather all the beauty into one last thrilling look of admiration, and then descend for our walk home.

JUNE TWILIGHT.

THE sun has sunk an hour ago behind the wood to the west. A low rushing sound fills the air; it might be a gentle wind, but the leaves are quite still. It is really the stream murmuring from a rapid below the bridge. By day the noise of its flowing water is inaudible, but in the stillness of evening it falls sensibly on the ear—a faint, steady rush of sound. Though the song of birds has ended, and in the quiet country hamlet tired workers are preparing for rest, there is no cessation of active life. From a seat under the yew hedge innumerable winged creatures can be seen, above the trees, near the shrubs, and against the sky close to the projecting eaves. There seems more insect life than by day itself. Above a sycamore-tree a cloud of gnats flit up and down as if one life-pulse animated them all. Up and down, now a hazy cloud, now a pillar of smoke, they move incessantly, rejoicing in the fulness of their short life. Moths are flying all about—bright-coloured yellows, more sober browns, and mottled greys. Two ghost moths—large white

ones — are burring above the tussocks of grass in the field. Another is wheeling with rapid motion about the end of a chestnut bough.

It is an ideal night, the air feels so soft and balmy, moist but not wet. Sounds break from the background of evening stillness as if nature were dreaming aloud. To the north-west, above the hidden sun, is a faint yellow glare of light. It will linger all night, travelling slowly round the horizon until, farther eastward, it break into the splendours of a new day. On a clear evening of June it is never quite dark; in the open you can read fairly good print until eleven o'clock without straining the eyes. Thrush and redbreast sing as late as ten. Later still there are lovely lights over the fields, and rose-coloured cirrus clouds in the northern sky. A bank of vapour shrouds the low ground along the stream, concealing part of the trees. Their rounded tops, thick with June foliage, rise from it like islands from a foam-covered sea.

The sun set to-night behind the wooded hill to the north-west, its highest setting-point in the circuit of the year. Another hill to the south-west gives the lowest point of its winter setting, and there the sun disappears in the short wintry day. From hill to hill, a distance of forty-seven degrees about the horizon, does the sunset travel: a full swing of the sun pendulum measures the year. As the clock beats out the passing minute, the silent swing of this heavenly pendulum beats out the hours of a life.

Each morning and night the sun rises and sets at a different point: only twice, going and returning, is it exactly in the east and west.

The moist mild evening has made the insect hosts stir abroad in unusual numbers. From every bit of cover they come—the longer grass on the lawn, the hedges, and the ivy that covers the wall. There is no end to them, fresh swarms are constantly issuing forth. The great marvel is how such a world of insect life could have hid so successfully by day. But for many their short doubling flights are a veritable dance of death, to-night such a number of bats are busy preying on them. They follow the insect swarms as ravenous fish the shoals of the sea. On bare, chilly evenings, when the insects hardly stir abroad, neither do the bats; but this is one of their feast-nights.

Common bats flit leisurely up and down the drive or circle round the house. Often they disappear for a moment in the shadow of the eaves, but long enough to seize an insect close to the wall. You may hear in the evening stillness the sudden snip of bat teeth meeting in their insect prey. If it be a large moth, it is quite visible in the creature's mouth as the bat flies overhead.

There are numbers of another bat—Daubenton's—circling round the trees. It is easy distinguishing them from the common kind, their habits and appearance are so different. On the wing they look larger with longer ears, and fly more rapidly. The

trees about the house and along the field are their hunting-ground, while the common one keeps more to the open. With wonderful speed Daubenton's bats thread their way among the branches, hunting tree after tree, and then returning to repeat their search. Circling about the boughs in the twilight, so close sometimes as to make the leaves rustle, or poising above them on rapidly moving wing, they resemble nothing so much as large moths themselves. As many as four or five hunt one of the old churchyard sycamores at the same time, and there are always a good few on mild summer evenings near the stream.

For years these seemed to be all our bats; but an accident revealed a third kind. Through a ventilator in the church roof a young one fell, with ears grotesquely disproportionate to the small body. Others have been found in the same way since, but the long-eared bat is much rarer in the neighbourhood than the other two.

Church and old aisle provide shelter during the daytime for most of the bats of the parish. Every mild evening as twilight deepens they issue forth in large numbers. One night, from the loose slates of the aisle alone, more than a hundred bats came so fast that there was hardly time to count them. They did not leave in a steady stream, but in groups, as if each group consisted of bats that clustered together inside.

As the nights lengthen and the lights are earlier

lit, soft taps come to the windows. They might be the sound of a twig driven against the glass by a strong breeze, but are heard most often on the calmest nights. Disturbing and difficult to explain to one not accustomed to them, these are really the sounds made by bats striking the panes in their pursuit of moths that have been attracted to the glare of the light. They frequently find their way into the house, entering the large inner hall by the doors. More rarely a bat follows yellow underwings and smaller moths through the open study window.

Flying beetles are droning past in the air. One rises here and there from the grass close to the hedge. They all make for the open fields from the woods, and the covert about the house. Outside the trees, across the drive, large numbers of them pass, and a drowsy sound, like that made by a humble-bee, comes from their moving wings. They are insects of the twilight and the falling shadows. As they fly past, most of them but winged sounds, the very mystery that shrouds them and their movements makes the mind somehow associate them with strangely weird thoughts.

Though so late, the call of the cuckoo still comes across the fields, and a corncrake has been crexing loudly among the hay. Like the note of the nightingale, it sounds best when the dew is on the grass. One season three crexed together within a short distance of the house. Above a near field the lap-

wings circle and call. All the night their notes will come through the window—not the happy sounds of the springtime, but a short, complaining *weet, weet, peeweet.* They are the restless spirits of bird life, condemned, day and night, in uneasy flight, to expiate some forgotten crime. The tragic story of Tereus and his dreadful banquet becomes strangely credible as the screaming cries sound from the darkness.

But the evening stillness reasserts itself, and consciously impresses the listening heart. It is not the stillness of death that terrifies, but the stillness of life that is so satisfying and full of peace. This stillness has found a voice, and other sounds are hushed to listen. Too subtle for the senses, spiritual not physical, ether rather than matter of sound, the soul becomes conscious of it in the silence of night, the sound of a never-ending life, the murmur of a living river that never stays in its course. By day and night it flows steadily, but it is in the calm of evening that we can hear it, as, from the bridge, we hear the rush of the stream.

The hours are fleeting and we must leave it, all the deep delight of the dewy summer night. We have made it ours by our conscious enjoyment of it, and yet it has a purpose wider than man. To-night, when human life is sunk in unconscious slumber, new insect hosts will be as active as those of the sunshine, and the bats feast upon them until grey

dawn; the beetles will drone past, careless of a listening ear, and the peewits call above the fields; a sedge-warbler will sing its hurried medley of a song among the willows of the marsh; and, from the wood, a brown owl will fly silently to its nightly perch on a yew-tree by the manse doorway to watch for its wary prey.

PARISH RECORDS.

I.

IN the churchyard stands an ivy-covered building known as the old aisle. Ancient and impressive in appearance, it excites the interest of all who visit the parish. Though now but a burying-vault, the aisle was once part of an earlier church.

In a side wall is a narrow doorway sunk more than a foot beneath the level of the ground, which has risen in the course of centuries with the number of interments. Any one entering by this door must stoop low to avoid the heavy stone lintel; but there is a larger and more convenient entrance in the north end of the building. Here the masonry appears very much more recent; at one time the whole end had opened directly into the church, the aisle being really an old transept. One or two stones have been built into it for preservation, with dates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on them.

The interior does not disappoint the promise of the outside. Overhead a rounded oak roof is covered

with ancient frescoes, though in a sadly damaged state. One side is in better preservation, and on it has been represented the judgment scene. There are three panels, the centre one with Christ on a rainbow as judge, a sword that seems to pass through His head as the symbol of justice; on His right the blessed walk through flowery fields, and, on the left, devils are pushing naked souls down through very realistic flames that appear to rest on a sea with swimming fish. On the opposite side of the rounded roof are scenes from the life of Christ, some of them almost entirely obliterated. Overhead a line, with beautifully carved bosses at intervals, runs along the centre of the roof to divide the frescoed pictures.

Fronting the doorway is a mullioned window with three lights, the mouldings of exquisite workmanship. On the gravelled floor of the old aisle a large baptismal font of conglomerate sandstone, and a smaller octagonal, holy-water stoup, with some stones from the primitive building, have been placed for preservation.

There are other traces of pre-Reformation age, among them an aumrie in one wall for sacred vessels. Near it is a stone slab, giving the date of the foundation as 1479. The church, of which the transept formed a part, was one of those collegiate charges founded throughout the country towards the close of the fifteenth century. The present church was built in part with its stones,

and in the walls the eye can readily detect many of them from their flutings and finer finish.

The lord of the manor who built the earlier church endowed it for a provost and three prebends, and his son—afterwards killed at Flodden—added two prebends more. But this early church was built on the site of an earlier still, and it probably succeeded one of the old Culdee settlements.

For a century after the Reformation the parish annals continue very meagre. The church records, still preserved, begin with the year 1663. From this date the history of the parish, embodied in the church, has a living interest, and, with only a brief interruption at long intervals, continues until the present day.

These records are very interesting for the light they cast on the life of an old country parish. But they possess a wider than merely parochial interest. Echoes of great national events sound through them as tides of the open ocean reproduce themselves in quiet pools by the shore. From the appointed fasts —days of humiliation and thanksgiving days—we can read broadly the history of the nation. They commemorate national dangers and famous victories, changes in the succession to the crown and in the forms of religion.

There were other fasts that touched more deeply the hearts of an agricultural community—fasts for times of disastrous weather and threatened famine. One fast was appointed by the Church, "causes

whereof are the rigour of the winter and frost, the coldness of the oat-seed time, death of cattell." Another is a thanksgiving fast "by appointment of Synod for ye rich provision of a plentiful crop after such a great scarceness of food, there being many in great hazard of perishing for want of it, had not corn come from other countries for our relief."

A community of sentiment bound the parishes together in these early times in spite of difficulties of communication; there was no such thing even then as parochial isolation. Each parish recognised claims on its charity and bounty from other parts of the country, and raised, through the Church, large sums to meet them. Collections are constantly intimated in the records for a variety of purposes outside the parish—the building of colleges, harbours, and bridges, disastrous losses, and cases of severe suffering. One "by order of counsel is for repairing the old colledge of St Andrews." Another was "for building a Church for Protestants in Koenigsburg in Prussia (for Scotsmen)." Another still was taken "for the toune of Kelso, which had suffered great prejudice by fire." Several were for sailors captured by Turks and Salee rovers; one "for a young man taken at sea by savages." There are many more in the same spirit; but these will show how parochial sympathies were then stimulated by the needs and distresses of others, and the life of each parish kept fresh and healthy by entering into a wider life than its own.

The chief interest of the records centres, however, in the light they cast on the life of the parish itself. All the old parochial energies found expression through the Church. From her every movement for the relief of misery, for the correction of morals, for the raising of the people in any form, began and drew the inspiration that kept it alive. The education of the young was entirely in her hands. Through her parish court, the Kirk-session, she appointed the schoolmaster, built him a house, and kept the school in repair. The training of the young was only one of the duties which he had to do for the Church. One early entry in the records bears that "John Jack was admitted to be schoolmaster, precentor, clerk to the Session." At another meeting the Session definitely fix his salary at "a merk off each plough, a load of meal, and all casualties."

In 1726, through the ruinous condition of the school buildings, the children were taught for a time in church, but the Session did not find this a satisfactory arrangement. There is a good deal of quiet, unconscious humour in the account of it, all the more effective for being so solemn-faced. "For some time there has been a necessity of using the church for a schoolhouse, yet it is inconvenient so to do on account of the cold, it being not proper to hold fire in such a place; also because the young ones are in danger, on the one hand, of being hurt by the seats in the church as they play among them,

which, so long as they meet there, it is not to be expected they will altogether be restrained from, and, on the other hand, of doing hurt to the church, especially the seats and glass windows; therefore the Session agree to build ane schoolhouse."

Besides the merely local teaching of the children, the Church provided means to help her cleverer sons or those of other parishes in their studies farther afield. Every year two pounds were paid to the Presbytery as the bursar's money.

Public charity in all its different forms was the special care of the Church. Her poor-box represented the parish exchequer. Through this source of revenue she had often large sums of money at her command. From the box the church gave loans to people in temporary need on bills and promissory notes to be redeemed by a specified date. Such loans were occasionally a source of difficulty and anxiety to the Session. Some members who received them in times of distress had to be threatened "with legall diligence" before the money could be recovered. In 1695 an act was enforced against elders being cautioners for loans. Larger ones were given on better security to landlords and people of responsibility about, as well as to neighbouring towns.

Many sources of income went to increase the money at the church's disposal. What remained of weekly collections, after all immediate calls upon them had been satisfied, was put into her box.

Fines for breaches of Church discipline contributed yearly a goodly sum. Occasional mortifications were another means of revenue. So were the sums raised from pew-letting in church, from graveyard dues, and the interest of money already lent. One remarkable source from which the box received contributions at long intervals consisted of the fines paid by poachers convicted within the bounds of the parish. A few years ago, in a local poaching conviction, this old usage was recognised. The bad coins found in the Sunday collections were not quite useless. At one time it is recorded that there were a great number of doits and bad half-pennies in the poor-box. These were sent to town "to one who buys them," and five pounds eight shillings Scots got in return.

Out of the box and from the different Sunday collections the church distributed the parish bounty with open hand. To mark genuine distress and deserving character, badges and testimonials were given by the session to beggars or other people in difficulty. Each parish church granted a number of these for their own poor, and renewed them from time to time, or took them away when abused. In one part of the records we read that a testimonial was given to a woman for "ane year and a half," and "testimonials were received from severall others."

Testimonials, sometimes called certificates, papers, or passes, are shown, too, from presbyteries, bishops, magistrates, and people of any responsibility.

Generally they recommend the bearer to the charity of all good Christians.

A motley group of distressed humanity these old recipients of parochial charity must have been! There were all kinds and conditions, from broken gentry to common beggars. Among them were waifs and strays from distant parts of the country, appealing to the generosity of each church as they passed. For some dreadful sores pleaded more urgently than any written testimonial. Halt and blind, palsied and dumb, victims of war or dreadful accident, they gathered to the church door at the close of service for their expected dole; Communion Sunday brought a great number of them.

One day are "given to four blind" and to "ane who had his legs grown up behind his arms," six shillings. "Ane cripple man qch had been carried five years on ane barrow" receives one shilling.

An interesting and touching entry is the case of a daughter of the minister of Edertoune, "recommended by the magistrates and minister of Tain." This hapless sufferer stands out from the old brown page, a breathing picture of suffering. Her trouble must have been sore, for under stress of it she is going south to be touched for the king's evil. Thus far the Providence that has a special care for the helpless and little children has brought her. At the church door she, too, presents her testimonial, and gets generous assistance to continue her long, toilsome, and dangerous way.

There are shipwrecked mariners among the suppliants, and broken soldiers returning from foreign wars. Some have had their homes destroyed by fire, and others have suffered through troublous times. Donald Shaw gets relief, "who had sustained losses by the Mc.Fearsons carrying off a drove." The country was in a wretchedly insecure state at the time. "All his goods and gear were taken from him by the Highland army," is the written testimony of another. Several have been "robbed by highwaymen," one poor woman coming from Aberdeen. Widows bring their fatherless children to excite pity. Assistance is granted to "Jannet Stewart, whose husband was killed at Gilliekrankie."

No doubt many of the suppliants at the church door were only impostors. Some carried false testimonials, and others brought nothing more than a piteous tale. The Session gave to these also at their discretion; but one "is straitly forbidden to come back to seek any more."

Strangers who have fallen ill in the parish are supported out of the church funds during their sickness. Part of several collections is given for their "ail and board." One page has an entry of two pounds paid for the funeral expenses of a stranger that died on the road.

What the records bear witness to as much as anything is the kindly humanity of these earlier times. The members of the Session, stern enough

with offences against parish discipline, had really warm and tender hearts. A delightful testimony to this side comes through the discovery of a foundling child by the moor. For a time the records centre round him and his needs. The little stranger, thrown so suddenly upon parish charity, might have been a long-expected prince. The whole parish took a warm interest in him, standing sponsor, and, through the Session, acting a kindly foster-mother's part. He was given to one of the parishioners to bring up, "the quarter's bond being four libr [pounds Scots] and a peck of meal." All the items of his expense are carefully noted, among them shoes bought "for the found child," and, again, "a coat and a pled." The little foundling continues a memorial to the humanity of his day; his early death prevented any other return.

Help was often given out of the church funds to members of its own community. In ruinous seasons, and on occasion, the church distributed meal and clothing as well as money.

Provision is made in one part for "four poor scholars cast on the box." Elsewhere "the Session agreed to give Helen Deuchars, in this parish, a duffel cloak, a serge goun, and a wincie apron," the whole, including making, lining, and thread, not to exceed one pound ten shillings. A daughter receives money to help her to defray her mother's funeral charges, part of them being for "four pynts of ail at burial and making grave." Poor members

who have fallen victims to disease are assisted to enable them to get medical advice and proper treatment.

In these and other ways the Church did her part in directing and distributing the charity of the country. Before the day of poor laws she was the great benevolent agency of the people, and her box the recognised treasury of the poor.

II.

The care of the order and discipline of the parish was the most difficult of all the duties the old Church undertook. Each Kirk-session was a little court of justice, modelled on patriarchal and Hebrew rather than present-day lines. Almost every form of offence came under its jurisdiction. Plaintiff and defendant appeared before it, on occasion, together. Witnesses were cited, and difficult cases delayed for additional evidence. The searching minuteness of examination, the whole course of procedure, as given sometimes in the records, would do credit to a modern court of law.

Before the Session cases came up continually; so unusual was it to have a meeting without one that the entry occasionally occurs, "No disorder complained on." Charges were often made by one parishioner against another, directly or through one of the elders. Such a practice opened a doorway

for ill-founded accusations and malicious slanders; but, as a safeguard, unproved charges exposed the complainant himself to reprimand and punishment.

The penalties imposed by the Session were very varied. For most part they consisted of fines of money, proportioned to the gravity of the offence. In addition the delinquents had to profess their penitence. Where the fault was a first one, and slight, the elders were satisfied with a profession of it before themselves and a promise to amend. Worse offenders had to make their repentance publicly in the presence of the whole congregation. Some were enjoined to do it upon their knees; others occupied the seat of repentance—the stool or pillar—through one or more diets of worship. This seat was put in a conspicuous place, where the occupant could be seen by every one entering the church. Money is given by the Session "to John Key for his pains in putting up of the seat of repentance above the west door of the kirk."

The white sheet—a relic of the ancient sackcloth—was another method of putting evil-doers to shame. One woman who had slandered a neighbour was heard by some in the parish to say that "she would say it although for that they would cause her weare the sark goune before the Presbytery." The charge of slander was brought against the husband as well. The Session decided that they should both make their repentance before the

congregation, "his wyfe to appear in the whyt sheet, and to pay three dollars of penaltie."

There were other means and instruments of punishment than these, well known to every one who has studied the history of an old parish; but if they were used here, the records make no mention of them. An iron collar for the neck of offenders—the jougs—is still attached by its chain to the wall of a parish church a few miles away.

The charges that come up for decision by the Session cover nearly the whole range of parochial life and conduct. Happily the annals of the parish are not tarnished by any admitted accusation of witchcraft, though cases arise that indicate generally the superstitious spirit of the times. A point of evidence against a woman is that she "prayed and urged the devil to raise Andrew Hutcheon from the grave." A man is summoned "upon the report that he cured cattell and used charms with his cures." Having compeared, "he denyeth that he used any charm and all other things he was charged with." He is received before the Session and straitly forbidden "to give any occasion of the like things that was laid to his charge either by word or deed." Another woman has to pay a fine, part of her offence being that she called her neighbour "witch, warlock, and wolfe." But though there are no recorded cases of convicted witchcraft in the parish, hapless creatures were being burned alive, at the time, on "the witches' howe" by the

lochs. The records of one, if not more, of the parish churches about give as a reason for Sunday service being omitted the absence of the minister at a trial of witches. Convictions were secured in many cases by the help of the parish sessions, and the charges found their first expression there; so that the Church must bear a large share of the odium for this cruel and frenzied outburst of a superstitious age.

Immorality was the most flagrant sin of the old parish. Many of the pages of the records that deal with it are neither pleasant nor healthy reading. In spite of heavy fines and public exposure the morals of parochial life were then much more corrupt—a century and farther back—than a higher public opinion, and, in the country at least, a deeper reverence for woman, and of womanly self-respect, have made it now. The increasing freedom from the vice of immorality, with its attendant degradation and shame, in rural places at least, where it was once so prevalent, is one of the best features of the time.

The sanctity of the Sunday was carefully preserved by the Church. Offenders against it were frequently brought before the bar of the Session. There is a special interest in the account of their offences, from the incidental references they make to the earlier life and manners of the parish. The parish miller is "fined for setting on ye mylne upo' Sunday night before twelve." Two women "are found

guilty, of late, of the profanation of the Lord's day by their travelling on a Sabbath evening about sunset from their own houses to Balgay carrying their instruments openly wherewith they dress flax in the same place next day. They are rebuked." At another meeting two men compear "before ye Session, they being charged by ye church officer for breaking ye Sabbath by rising out of ye beds before midnight and putting on ye crils on horsback to go to ye sea for fishes, for which they were sorry and acknowledged ye guilt, and they likways promised never to do so any more. They are suitably admonished by ye minister." One man is cited for "breach of ye Sabbath in that he was among the minister's grass last Lord's day before ye sun." Another confesses his sin "in breaking the Sabbath by turning, binding up, and stooking some of his corn." Several more appear for "shearing their corn." A maid-servant professes her penitence and pays a penalty for the offence of "bargaining about a plaid on Sunday afternoon."

In a country parish, at the time, church was the only place where the people met regularly in any numbers. This fact was taken advantage of for making intimation of events of general interest that were to take place during the week. Against the practice the elders struggled, seeking sternly to put it down as a secularising of Sunday. A frequent intimation of the kind made at the church gate to the people as they left was the wad-shooting, a

gathering of the male members of the community to shoot for prizes. One offender after another, in rapid succession, was summoned because they profaned Sunday "by shouting a Wad-shooting in ye hearing of ye people." The church officer himself had to compear "for crying a roup on the Lord's day." But the opportunity was too tempting, and this habit of intimation too deep-seated, to be readily put down. The session at last referred the matter to the Presbytery, and it is never heard of again.

Neglect of Church ordinances was a frequent cause of offence. "Divers persons are appointed to be summoned against the next day for not keeping their dyets of examination and absenting themselves." Six others compear "for absenting themselves from Communion on account of envie." In 1680 church attendance had grown so remiss that "an act of the Presbytery was read from the pulpit against scandalous persons and such as kept not the church." "The elders of the parish in their several quarters" were enjoined "to take notice of such persons, and to give ane account of them to the minister and Session."

Intemperance is very rarely mentioned as a parish vice, but swearing was a very common one. Both men and women are brought before the elders for "scandaling and prophaning God's name by swearing." Most of them are fined, and have to make a public penitence.

Charges of theft are often recorded, and counter-charges for defamation of character. A parishioner is summoned "for Sunday profanation and theft." Another brings a complaint against two neighbours "for raising ane evil report on him, and for scandalising him by taking away his good name and honest reputation by alledging that he got Andrew Fuller's purse by slight, and that he broke Alexander Stewart in Pykertoune his barn and took home some oats and some dry fish." "Joan Reid giveth in ane complaint upo' John Davidson for saying she stealled ane pair of bed plaids out of the mill from him. John Davidson called compeared could not prove that she stealled the plaids."

Some parishioners were a source of special trouble to the Session; the names of hardened offenders occur again and again. One, here and there, refused to compear when summoned. Others who compeared were not duly impressed with a sense of their sin, and had to be summoned again and "seen by the minister." Some were more shameless in their bearing than others. One man "got into a most unbecoming passion, and refused to be rebuked publicly." A woman "for railing upon an elder upon his duty and obstinacy in sin confesses her sin upon her knees and promises a better behaviour." Troublesome cases were delayed, and the delay often made an excuse for getting quit of them altogether. Occasionally a case was referred to the Presbytery—the stronger and more

dreaded court behind the Session—for advice or decision.

What gave the elders as much thought and anxiety as anything was the promotion of the general harmony and good feeling of the parish. There were quarrelsome members of the community who were constant sources of disquiet and complaint. Neighbours made charges against one another of scandaling, backbiting, and traducing. "John Ritchie and his wife are called to the Session by Patrick Pyot for abusing and revyling of him." At next meeting the said John Ritchie "confesses that he revyled Patrick Pyot, but affirms that Patrick Pyot wronged him more than he did him."

The parties to the strife were sometimes asked to come to the kirk on a week-day to have their differences composed by the minister and some of the elders. When the scandal was more difficult to investigate the Session met at the place of dispute to examine witnesses there. One such meeting in an outlying part of the parish was "to hear parties and compose their differences and agree them."

By these and other means, apart from her ordinances and constant teaching, the old Church struggled to promote charity, check crime, and keep the peace of the community, as well as to deepen its religious life. In her courts the distinction between sacred and civil law was broken down. Thus she struggled to bring home to the hearts of the people the majesty of the law in a turbulent

and lawless age. Largely by her means it was made to permeate the common life and appeal to the common conscience of the country: she taught men to hear in the voice of law the voice of God. On this side part of her work was transitional. She was preparing the way for a time when the law of the land would vindicate its own majesty, making its awe-inspiring voice heard in every part of the country, penetrating the lowest depths of society, bringing a higher conception of freedom, and a new sense of security into the humblest lot.

A DAY OF REST.

SOME belated rooks have young in the rookery near the station. The cawing of the old birds, little more than a field-breadth away, makes a pleasant reposeful sound, in keeping with the stillness and peacefulness of the day. Everything, to the murmur of the water and the white clouds drifting leisurely eastward high overhead, ministers to this sense of peace. Here, by the stream, the heart feels it, and every troubled thought is lulled to rest. There comes a feeling of detachment from human interests; even the voices from the road, that are really louder for the stillness, sound faint and far away.

Spring has gone and summer is advancing. Close to the wicker-work chair is a faded leaf, the first faint shadow of autumn just touching the glorious fulness of summer, as some sudden thought in one of life's happiest moments dashes the joy with a transient strain of regret. The eye rested on it for an instant, and then lost it again in the spring-tide flood of life around.

From the ditch the kingcups have passed: a

month since they glowed with intensest colour against the dark green of their own leaves. Children gathered them, and "milk and water," the pale pink cuckoo-flowers from the field behind us. They are both gone; but nature has seen fresh visions of beauty, and turned them into man's daily speech. As some poet of earth, she is always most happy when she finds words for the divine thoughts that come to her, that others may rejoice in them as well as herself. Expression is life for her, because her joy is unselfish: its highest condition is that it should make others rejoice. So vision follows vision, each one fair as that which went before it. Parts of the field among the rushes are deep pink with ragged robin, and, all about them, the grass is sprinkled and stained with buttercup gold.

In an opposite meadow are a flock of lapwings, whose nesting cares for the season are over. Every day increases their numbers, and a month or two later there will be thousands. There is a curious lack of apparent vitality in them; some are searching for food, but the greater number sit bunched up among the grass for hours. Young birds are mingled with the old, dingier-breasted and without the rich gloss on the back that will come after the first moult. Down the stream others are calling plaintively; they have young, still dependent on their care. Plenty of water, to wade and feed in, is a necessity of a young lapwing's life. Each year

the old birds bring their nestlings to the stream from the fields about. These are real waders, their long legs carrying them freely through the shallows, and on occasion they swim readily. Some of them resort to the drift islets in the middle of the stream, that can be reached only by swimming, and, when suddenly disturbed, they take to the water again at once.

Within a few minutes all the four kinds of swallows have passed in the air. Shrill-voiced swifts circle round the church — where they have come for the first time in many years to nest — and then wing their way over the fields with tremendous speed. The note of a passing sand-martin is like the sound made by two pebbles rubbed together. Gliding house-martins come and go, their broad backs and white-tail coverts glistening in the sunshine. Tamest of all, a pair of twittering barn-swallows sit preening their feathers on a wire fence close at hand, the male in lovely plumage, with long wiry tail-shafts and vivid red throat. More of them are flying among the feeding cattle, and skimming the rushes and buttercups. Several constantly pass up and down the stream within a few feet of us. They love to dip themselves in the cool water; one has done it three times in rapid succession, raising little splashes. As they rise from it you can hear the fluttering noise that they make to dry themselves.

The grass parks on the other side of the stream

are let every spring. Cattle pasture peacefully in one of them, and some young colts are making friends with one another across a field wall. Under shadow of the old willows is a drinking-place made by wooden bars that project into the stream beyond the line of wire-fencing. Here cattle and horses stand in the heat of the day.

Birds share this drinking-place with them; the steep grassy banks keep them from getting readily to the water at other places. Already we have seen a number of kinds,—chaffinches, redpolls, greenfinches, sparrows, blackbirds, starlings, and others. The cattle pond is seldom without some of them during the day. Wading breast-high into the water, they raise clouds of spray about them, and fly heavily afterwards to the fence above. From the length of time they remain in the water, starlings and sparrows appear to enjoy their bath most of all.

But more uncommon birds have come to-day to drink. For a time they rested in the branches of the willows overhead, and were mistaken for ringdoves. Less shy than these, they flew down to the field near the water, and showed themselves a very pretty pair of stock-doves. Rare in this part of the country—though perhaps often overlooked as ordinary wood-pigeons—the joy of seeing them made the heart beat faster. Some movement sent them into the willows again, where they flew from branch to branch, plucking at the dead twigs.

They were close enough to let their beautiful burnished necks be seen, glancing green and pink tints passing into pale blue farther down the breast. Smaller than the ring-dove, without the white-collared neck, it was easy distinguishing them. A second time they came down to drink, and then flew away over the fields.

The *curk* of the moor-hen is the commonest sound from the stream. The eye follows the direction of the note, and one is seen swimming near a clump of bur-reeds with that air of caution which is a familiar feature of the bird. In the spring-time the males engage in furious battles close to where we are sitting. A good many pairs have their nests along the reach of the stream from this rushy field to the railway bridge, and in the old curling-ponds alongside: to the casual glance they are nothing more than large heaps of reeds. When surprised on her nest, the old bird sometimes buries her head in the feathers of the back to hide her glancing eyes, but more often she has disappeared in the reedy thicket, after carefully covering her eggs. Among the browsing cattle moor-hens lose all the wariness that they show in their relations with man.

Greenfinches have been singing in the manse trees. One rises into the air, calling "*breeze, breeze,*" turning on one side, then on the other, with wings outstretched like a gliding swallow. It is the time of chaffinch song: four are singing

within hearing; but blackbird and thrush are almost silent.

As evening advances the shadows of the tall willows stretch over the fields. A soft, far-away note falls on the ear. Listening, the sound becomes more definite. It is the peal of bells from the steeple of the parish church in the county town — seven miles away — summoning the worshippers to service. Over a well-tilled country, over large stretches of water, down the stream from the west, the notes are stealing, until the quiet air around is gently vibrating with them. At this distance it seems a spirit sound rather than one of earth. The soft, sweet peal of the distant bells calls the heart to worship; under the broad canopy of heaven it joins the worshippers in the pillared church.

Other bells are pealing around us though we do not hear them now. The thick foliage muffles their sound. But on wintry evenings the deep-toned note of another from a town to the south may be heard on the door-step—a slow-voiced, solemn toll, against which jangle the bells of the village churches.

The only note of discord in this Sabbath peace is the noise of revellers returning along the highway to town. Unhappily for the quiet of the country, trap and bicycle bring them far afield. Things are much better than they were; rural communities have begun to protect themselves

against outside desecration of their day of rest. They suffered in silence far too long, and got only a bad name for it.

The village down the stream, with the church spire visible across the fields, was one of the most pointed cases. Its position, midway between several towns, exposed it specially to these undesirable Sunday incursions. People—a large proportion of them fast young men—who were not *bona fide* travellers at all took constant advantage of the Traveller's Act. Unseemly scenes were often witnessed on Sunday evenings, and the villagers molested on their way to worship. But the growing evil has, at length, wrought its own cure: annoyed beyond endurance, the community petitioned the Court of Justices to such good purpose that all the Sunday licences have been taken away.

To-night there is no discordant sound; everything suggests peace—a deep, full peace that passes understanding. Nature is wrapt in a dream of quiet bliss. She imparts it to the human spirit; God's day is man's day in the best sense. Thoughts come from the stillness, as clouds rise above the horizon. New worlds open, and life reveals new depths. For real self-knowledge an hour with nature is worth a century of the schools.

BEFORE THE DAWN.

A FAINT breeze shivered in the leaves of the aspen-tree. Above the stream lay a long line of mist where the vapour condensed in the chilly morning air. The fields in the distance appeared indistinctly through the grey twilight. Pewits called above the nearer ones, and a sedge-warbler sang continuously from the bushes of the marsh. Bats were returning from their nightly parish haunts and flitting round the old aisle. In the churchyard the light flutter of their wings could be heard—there were so many. Some of them disappeared through the crannies of the loosely slated roof; others came to a wooden-barred window in the end of the church. As the light grew, increasing numbers came. Sometimes six or eight bats returned together to the window, like bees to their hive.

While the bats were still coming home, two owls hooted to one another from neighbouring woods. A fainter note preceded the long-drawn *hoo-hoo-hoo-oo* of the nearer one—half screech—as if the bird were clearing its throat. From the open cart-shed barn-

swallows twittered, and two presently flew past the church. A wild duck crossed overhead with whistling flight, returning from feeding among the fields. In the sky to the north-east a steely glare was the only sign of the coming dawn. Overhead the colour grew deeper, and more of a sapphire tint to the south.

As yet the hoot of the owl, the call of the pewit, and the song of the sedge-warbler were the only bird-sounds. But about two o'clock there was a marked stir of life. A redbreast began the general chorus of song. Two blackbirds followed, and a minute afterwards a thrush joined them, whistling loud and clear from the highest sprays of an ash. Chaffinches, willow and common wrens, gradually added their song tribute, and a lark rose into the air to pour forth its matin hymn. *Chee-chee-cheeah*, the yellow-hammer sang lazily in a hawthorn bush. The chilliness of morning gave a crisp, spring feeling to the air, and the swelling song increased the impression of spring. All the promise of the day lies in the morning, as in spring lies all the promise of the year.

Bees were busy among plane-tree blossom, humming pleasantly. Ring-doves cooed, one in the elm-tree by the field wall. The rookery near the railway sent forth a constant cawing. A cock crowed, and others answered him. The twittering of barn-swallows and house-martins increased. From the moor came the notes of a cuckoo,

sounding faint from the distance. Pheasants called in the copse beyond the church. Two horses were eating quietly in a meadow on the other side of the stream. A hare fed quite near them; farther away some cattle were resting. The grass on the embankment was wet with heavy dew. Above, the shivering aspen leaves had two different motions—a circular as well as a swaying one.

Whitethroat, corn-bunting, greenfinch, and more larks had joined the growing bird-chorus. Sometime before sunrise it seems to reach its fulness; then it dies away about dawn, to swell again soon afterwards into a great outburst of song. For more than an hour before dawn the light steadily grew brighter. As we leaned on the tennis-green gate, it was interesting to watch the approaching sunrise. Over the north-east horizon the sky had grown clearer. Suddenly a wave of light swept across the fields. On the green and under the beech-trees the difference was very marked. A strong light seemed to have been turned on all at once where there was a feeble glimmering one before. Across the stream it passed to the woods beyond, then up the rising ground farther away. It was difficult to explain this sudden increase of light; the sun was still a good way beneath the horizon. Nature always works towards her ends by impulses, with sensible pauses between.

A faint rose tint crept into some cirrus clouds

in the north-east. The bright, steely glare moved farther up the sky; to the south, by contrast, the blue had become deeper. A cat returning from hunting the fields crossed the green. Some one was early at work hammering at the metals near the station. *Clank, clank, clank,* sounded clearly on the fresh morning air. Gnats were flying about, and midges had begun to be troublesome; a wasp, heavy with night dews, lit on a beech leaf near. In the loose tennis-green wall, hidden by ivy leaves, was a redbreast's nest. Every few minutes one of the old birds flew to it with food for the young. They often lighted on the branch of a tree above the wall—not by way of precaution, but for convenience. Neither of the birds betrayed any fear; they had never been molested, though people continually passed the nest.

The rosy flush on the cirrus clouds became more decided, changing to carmine and vermilion tints. A line of carriages on the railway reflected from their windows the ever-brightening glow. The centre of radiance on the horizon was behind a beech-tree in the middle of a field, but it moved slowly to the moor farther east. A sparrow gave a lazy chirp about three o'clock; soon afterwards more began to chirp in the ivy. Starlings were calling and whistling on the roof a little before them. The sparrow is the latest of all the birds to get up of a morning though he goes so early to bed. But, once begun, the bright, cheery

chirping drowns for a time with its volume every other sound.

The cirrus clouds were merely touched, at first, on their northern sides with rose and bright carmine from the hidden glow. But as it increased the light saturated those that were nearest to the dawn. The height of the cirrus clouds in the air enabled them to reflect the early sun-rays. Nearer the earth a heavy, vapoury cloud moved slowly; it was still a dull greyish-white. The light increased, changing the carmine tints to saffron. It rose higher with growing brightness. Everything was distinct and clear-cut in this early crystalline light, suggesting a picture by Beattie-Brown. Ring-doves began to coo again; the larks sang louder over the fields. With the increasing clearness the hawthorn showed white from its masses of blossom. Into the fresh morning air they distilled their sweetness like the breath of dawn itself.

The rose and carmine tints had mounted the sky; lower there was a golden glow, lighter than buttercup gold, half-way between the beech-tree and the moor. The heavens in the north-east were beautiful beyond words—an embodied aspiration of beauty. The low-hung cloud caught a portion of the upper radiance. Far above it the cirrus became more and more suffused with golden lights. They were pieces of heavenly cloth that invisible hands had strewed before the coming of the king of day. Each cloud was a centre of

radiance. Some smaller ones were like sparks of living flame from an unseen furnace, seraphim, spirits of the dawn. But the loveliness was exhausting. All the heart's powers were too feeble to gather it. Heaven's beauty was a thought too great for the mind.

It became a positive pleasure at last to turn from this overpowering radiance to little earthly details. A heron rose from the stream where it had been fishing through the short summer night. Pewits chased it with scolding cries, and the larger bird doubled, when they came near it, with strangely awkward flight. Overhead the rooks were flying to the fields, one or two of them croaking low and half-complacently. A long goods train rolled slowly past the station, and stopped beyond it to shunt off some heavily-laden waggons. The cat was still among the bushes; two blackbirds, with angry *pink-pink*, sought to drive it away from their young. Another blackbird note of alarm is a long-drawn, plaintive *tseep*.

The centre of light had moved to a fir-tree by the edge of the moor. Its dark branches were transfigured by the glow behind them. The silvery radiance dazzled the sight. Suddenly from the wood a strong ray shot up; the upper edge of the great sun followed it. Higher and higher he rose like a huge shield of burnished silver.

The birds sang with renewed energy; from all around came a full-throated concert of song. Earth was beautiful in the new-born light. Over fields and streams and woods it passed, re-creating everything. The heart paid its orisons in silent admiration. All nature rejoiced to welcome the risen sun.

ACROSS THE FIELDS.

A NARROW sheltered pathway leads to the tennis-green. Embowered in hedges and overhanging trees, the little iron gate opens with difficulty, twig and leaf press it so closely. Overhead, beech, elm and sycamore conceal the unclouded sky with summer foliage. From the gateway the eye looks over the green, and the grassy road along which the cows are driven to the field that lies between the house and the stream. Beyond this road the view is broken by another row of trees, and a wall that shuts off the wider farm fields. Not altogether broken,—there are openings between the wall and the lower branches that show part of a flat, well-cultivated country. One of these openings has focussed the air and made it visible. An atmospheric river flows slowly past with a quivering undulatory motion.

Cows are pasturing in the grass among yellow buttercups. So high has it grown that the starlings as they search for insects almost disappear. The young birds are easily recognisable by their lighter mouse colour and harsh calls. The swallows twitter

loud joyous notes as they glide low over the field, and wind and turn among the cattle. Like the starlings they show no fear of them, and at times a bird seems to pass under a quietly grazing cow.

In another field farm hands are busy hoeing the young turnips. A mail train passes, and most of them stand erect to look at it. Two women wave their hoes; the action is half mechanical. Familiarity itself never quite overcomes the strange feeling of fascination about a passing train It is the most visible and constant link between the little world of country life and the larger one outside. Above some of the carriages of the mail are plates with "Euston." Though hundreds of miles away, the hurrying train brings the bustle and rush of the great city nearer: it is a bit of the city itself on wheels. Besides this bridging of distance, there is a sense of indefiniteness and unlimited possibility about a rapid train that appeals to the imagination. No one responded, but the workers waved a greeting almost unconsciously—they had done it so often to the carriages as they rolled past.

Every available worker is busy among the rapidly growing turnips. The women do not find hoeing a very severe strain. The work belongs to a part of the year when it is joy and life to be in the fields, and numbers make the labour lightsome. They all strive to keep as near one another as possible, and get opportunities of doing mutual kindly services.

Field work has been rapidly changing its character

of later years. In harvest time improved machinery has almost driven the human worker from the fields. Under ordinary circumstances the farmer finds his own farm-hands amply sufficient. This is one cause of the depopulation of the country and the disappearance of so many cottages that once sheltered large families. As things are, one can easily understand the landlord allowing some of these houses to lie empty, or get into a ruinous condition: through age or want of work the inmates so often become chargeable to the parish rates, of which he pays a large part.

So far as the farmer is concerned, time has brought its revenges: there are seasons of the year when farm work stands sorely in need of outside help. The necessary workers are got then with considerable difficulty, in spite of the temptation of a high wage. Field labour at such far-detached seasons is not enough to support them, and they have to turn to other and more certain means of subsistence. Children often make cottage women living on the farm unavailable. Young women generally grow more and more averse to out-of-door work; nor is it to be wondered at, seeing that they have so many other more desirable opportunities of employment thrown open to them. In spite of its healthy habits and ofttimes pleasant associations, field work is for most part hard enough. Those who engage in it have literally to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. Some forms may be much lighter and

pleasanter than others. Hay-making was once the poetry of country life. We associate it still, though from books rather than actual experience, with jesting, laughter, and happy snatches of song, and enough of work to keep the day from growing wearisome. But in most country places such an idyllic scene belongs to the past even at hay-time, there are so few women-workers. Here, too, life's sternest painter comes closest to the truth. A great deal of field work has to be done in winter, often amid frost and snow, or in sloppy fields and pouring days. The hands get chapped and sore with constant exposure, and the feet frost-bitten. Worse still, the worker is exposed to painful and stiffening rheumatism, the most prevalent ailment of those who are engaged, week by week, at the labour of the fields.

In respect of age the character of the workers has been changed by the same causes that have reduced their numbers. As a rule they are much older and feebler than they were, many of them people who contrive by this means to keep a house over their heads and themselves as long as possible above public support. The farmer is glad to get any one; for lack of younger workers who find more congenial work, he has to be contented with elderly women and older men. For them the work of the fields is hard enough; it represents their struggle to keep the wolf from the door. They do have a hard struggle, —harder still from the fact that many of them have

spent their all on large and often neglectful families, and the oppressing thought that under the stress of increasing years they must soon give up their only means of support. Were it not for the kindly interest and private help of generous hearts in the community, many of these aging workers could not struggle so long.

We had a pitiable field-worker in the parish who came from the nearest village. He was one of those lonely souls whose past lives are shrouded in mystery. What he had been in his earlier days could never be ascertained. He was temperate and inoffensive, but a strong barrier of reserve kept him from ever entering into conversation about himself. On the road he generally answered remarks and greetings briefly enough. One of life's waifs and strays, he had drifted at last to the quiet country village. Though he was bent with years and infirmities, a warm-hearted farmer gave him work. The old man strove to repay his kindness with the best of his failing strength. Day after day in winter he dragged his feet slowly along to a turnip-field. I saw him, one day, stopping every few yards to recover his breath; he rested himself, leaning heavily on the wayside wall, and coughing with exertion, a hard racking cough. It was his last fight in life's sore struggle, but the brave spirit was unwilling to give way. He came for a few days more to the turnip-field exhausted before he began his work, and left one night never to return. Nature was perfectly worn out in him, and

a very short illness brought him almost painlessly to that place where the weary find rest.

Against this, never was there a time when field wages were so high. The farm-hand is one of the best paid members of a country community. Land has become so low in annual value that many of the old proprietors have had to let or sell their ancestral homes. The payment of portions by the heir to other members of the family impoverishes many estates. Often he is less to be envied than any of them, for numbers of estates by causes such as these have become heavily burdened, and a large part of the rental is swallowed up in meeting the interest. To the farmer, again, low prices and bad seasons have been equally ruinous, while field labour, apparently dependent to a large extent on the same circumstances, has gone on increasing in value. Young men, barely out of their teens, if strong and healthy, can command as much as twenty pounds half-yearly. Married farm-hands are paid in proportion, and have added perquisites as well.

Yet for his higher wage, it is a question if the farm-hand is really better off. He has become more restless than the older hands were, never staying long enough to allow a mutually helpful sentiment to grow up between him and his master. His Bohemian habits affect him for evil in other ways, though it is right to say that they are the product of the spirit of the age as much as of the farm-labourer's own nature and circumstances. The farmer himself is more

restless under the present system of land tenure. What was meant to help him in a time of rapidly falling prices threatens in some parts of the country to injure farmer and proprietor alike. The farmer holds his farm nominally under the old longer one, but the breaks practically make it a five years' lease. As a result farming is regarded, more and more, merely as an investment. Often it becomes a demoralising speculation, the temptations are so great. The farmer is afraid to put too much into the soil in case his uncertain tenure never allows him to realise it. Some, less principled, take advantage of the five years' break to impoverish the land, and then give up the farm. Fortunately for proprietor and future tenant, this class is an exceedingly small one, for the farmer has almost, without exception, dealt generously by the land; but the present system affords a temptation not always resisted in hard times.

The manor house is frequently rented by a stranger. Where this happens, proprietor and farmer seldom, if ever, see one another. Very often there is not even a local intermediary—strangers collect the rents and hear the tenants' grievances. This is a double evil—to the farmer because his wants rarely reach the proprietor's ear, to the proprietor himself because he loses the benefit of the experience that would help him in his dealings with his farmers, and, in a matter of vital importance to him, with the settlement of his farms to good tenants.

In these last also the times have brought changes. The farming class is not so sharply marked off as it once was from the other classes of the country. The freedom and apparent independence of landholding exercises a glamour over many. Tradesmen who have made money, and even professional men, become tenants of vacant farms. This again produces more changes, for some of them begin with too little capital, others with too little knowledge of agricultural work.

The farm-hand is infected by the prevailing restlessness and lack of sentiment. A young ploughman rarely stays more than six months on one farm. All that time he continues a hireling and a stranger on the land. The reverence and courtesy which do so much to elevate and refine human nature are too often conspicuously wanting in his case. But he needs a good deal of sympathy and forbearance; his circumstances have tended to make his class one by itself. The single ploughman has many hardships to bear, and few of the comforts and amenities of ordinary life. The bothy system deprives him of the raising influences of home and womanly attention. The wonder is that he has not fallen much lower than he has. All the best type of farm-hands seek to escape as early as they can from the evils of the bothy. It sends many of them to early and, unfortunately, not always prudent marriages.

The system has made the farm-servant what he is, but happily many young men resist its lowering tend-

encies. There are bright, high-principled spirits among them who strive to improve their position and to make their outlook on life as wide as possible. Some of these have been an honour to other ranks than their own. Nature herself cannot but exercise unconsciously a raising influence on these toilers of the field. The dullest mind among them must expand at times to the life and beauty around them —the daisy opening its yellow eye in the short spring sward, the lark carolling its early song above the plough, a beautiful sunset when the day's work is done. Most bothies have a pet of some kind to train the humaner feelings. Very often one of the farm-hands is a fair musician, and helps to make the winter evenings pass pleasantly. Draughts and dominoes are games that in many bothies exercise the young ploughman's skill and powers of thought. Others are fond of reading, and spend part of their wages in buying books. But when all has been said, the system is at root a bad one; it virtually ostracises the ploughman. The class generally must remain as it is, a class apart, until their condition is in some way ameliorated.

BROOK PATH.

WITH the return of summer, the most interesting of all our paths was the one along the brook. It was not really a footpath in the ordinary country sense; no one thought of taking it as a short way to any place. But for the lover of quiet ways and peaceful retreats, this gave it an increased interest and charm. The very difficulties of the brook path were a safeguard against frequent intrusion. Fence and loose-built wall came down from the fields above to the banks of the stream; smaller water-courses trickling over meadowy haughs made the ground soft and spongy; thickets of matted briar and thorn had to be pushed through; and precipices of clay, not high so much as steep and slippery, to be carefully crossed.

But these were difficulties only to a heart deaf to the siren voice of nature. When that inner sense which is both eye and ear has heard her speak through one of her many tongues—the leaf, the flower, the sunshine, or the murmuring stream—they fall away before the steps as the thickets that guarded the palace at the approach of the prince.

The brook-side was one of nature's best-loved shrines, and there more of her creatures waited on her than anywhere. They filled air and earth and the clear cold waters of the stream with their numbers,—the flowers that opened so fast under the bright sunshine were more varied and richer in gleaming tints than in other places; insect, bird, and furred creature, as well as the shadowy trout that darted up the pools and disappeared in the deeper water,—for them all the brook was a river of life. Abundant life everywhere, and a deep sense of restfulness to enjoy all its manifestations; on a calm evening stillness so perfect that the sound of the flowing water passed into it, and was lost as a river is lost in the ocean.

Here the spirit was enlarged and refreshed by contact with nature. Thought blossomed like the wild plants that struggled through the grasses to the air and the light. Life grew wider with every fresh fact that entered the mind, every new vision that revealed itself to the soul. The world of the brook, with all its manifoldness, was a mirror to reflect the world within. Along the quiet path that followed it, thoughts rose within one that had never found expression elsewhere.

This brought my own steps as often as possible to it; by the side of its babbling waters I found one of my best schools of thought. The rod, when it went along, was an excuse more than anything, it so seldom left the cover. Even if it had not appeared a desecration to have taken life under such circum-

stances, there was always too much to be noted to give the thoughts up to one object. The eye could never have enough of seeing, nor the ear of hearing, with the unsatisfied longing of the spirit within.

The brook joined the manse stream on the farther bank, above the village in the fields. Opposite the manse itself, though a mile higher up, so little had it diverged that a few minutes' walk by the road and the wooden bridge across the railway, then through the grounds of an old mansion-house, took you to the brook at one of its most attractive reaches. On a terrace above it was the large garden, with lovely beds of standard roses scenting the summer air. The grey ancient-looking dial, on the broad turf walk beyond them, shadowed the passing hour from morning to night.

A path led down through the trees to the brook-side, skirting the edge of the garden. Winding to cross a little tributary stream, it opened at once on a scene of sylvan wildness. It was not less wild for the quaint old dove-cot flanked by little ivy-clad turrets that rose from the edge of the lawn above, nor for the low stone bridge lower down the brook, almost hidden behind its veil of leaves. A broad mown walk ran alongside the bank, checkered with light and shadow. In summer it was always cool and refreshing here; the clear, cold, rushing water made one feel cooler just to see and hear it, as the sight of a fire gives an increased feeling of warmth in winter.

Flowers had been planted lavishly in the grass by the path side, and added their tribute of beauty, season by season, while they took a wilder character from their surroundings. Early spring brought hosts of snowdrops that whitened the banks of the smaller stream: as far up as one could see were two glistening borders of white. When they passed, daffodils of different varieties followed them. Cowslips sprang up among primroses and wood anemones; a garden veronica with deep-blue flowers covered one steep and well-shaded bank; bluebells and double meadow saxifrage grew in the unmown grass near the path. There was a constant succession of flowers late into summer, when purple martagon lilies rose high above the herbage about them.

Where the space widened between the streams, clumps of rhododendrons that fairly blazed in their season with bright masses of colour had been planted. This part of the grounds was known as the shrubbery, and kept with special care. No name could have better expressed its character, so many different shrubs grew among the rhododendrons—syringas, willow-leaved spireas, mahonias, weigelas, azaleas, with others, and through them everywhere on the side of the brook strong canes of pink-flowered American raspberry forced their way.

But the most interesting feature of the shrubbery, to those who care for such things, was an uncommon tree with large clean-cut leaves. It shadowed a grassy spot in the middle, opening to the mown

walk by a narrow pathway. Two seasons in succession this tree was covered with the orange-and-green tulip-like flowers from which it takes its name, and many came to see it.

Though evidently exotics, neither the tulip-tree nor the flowering shrubs were out of harmony with the place where they grew. Nature had laid her hand upon them and made them part of the wilder scene around them, the gliding brook, and the other woodland trees, with spaces of blue sky above. It was the wilder note that dominated everything and appealed to the eye.

Here the kingfisher sometimes came. For many years a pair of them frequented the brook; one season we had two pairs between it and the stream. Were it not for the cruel and senseless infatuation that is always so ready to destroy every rare and beautiful bird, we might have them constantly. One of our pairs soon disappeared, but the brook birds contrived to hold their own. They could be seen at any time in the nesting season flying up and down the water; once I saw one leaving the brook, where it passes through the grounds, with a trout firmly held in the strong bill. They had their nest that year in a hole of a clay bank farther up. The place might have been easily found; the bird passed overhead, peeping anxiously when you loitered here, but I never disturbed them. It was enough to see them flashing past or perched above the water: the sight of the living kingfisher, with its green and

azure tints, brought a keener thrill of pleasure and a higher sense of possession than any dead bird, however skilfully mounted, could ever have done. It was more mine that another might share its perfect beauty with me; that I, too, could come and enjoy the lovely vision again.

Above the grounds were the fields following the winding course of the brook. Where two loose stone walls met by the corner of one field, there was a piece of rising ground with a few fir-trees. The place has always been known as the Dane's grave. Local tradition has carried the name down through many years. Thus far some rugged old sea-rover had got in his flight from the stricken field on the seashore. In this spot he fell at last, fighting against heavy odds, overcome by weakness and cruel wounds. Peaceful is the place of his rest within sound of the stream, and the moan of the breeze in the boughs above him. There the bird sings sweetly in the summer evening, and cattle pasture beside his grave. O'er his dreamless slumber the pine-tree hangs its rugged branches, dark as the sweep of his raven's wing.

A faintly marked footpath followed the side of the fields, climbing a wall by projecting stones. At one place it crossed a wire fence to get closer to the water, where the fisherman used it. Wooded slopes rose from the banks with fields between; under the leafless trees, in some sheltered corner, you were always sure to find the earliest primrose of the year.

Then the first marsh marigolds had begun to glow along the brook; later they were so plentiful that they encroached upon many of the pools and formed round the stones golden masses of flowers, like islands that lie in the path of the sunset.

The floral wealth increased rapidly with advancing summer. Shut off from grazing cattle and left to nature, every narrow haugh was a perfect garden. Every footstep, however carefully it was placed, crushed beautiful petals. Large white marguerites, dull purple water-avens, white and pink campions, two varieties of comfrey, yellow iris, mingled together in sweet confusion. A muddy ditch was greyish-white at one part with small flowers of ivy crowfoot. Above the ditch, under the shadow of overbranching trees, woody nightshade covered the bushes with its trailing stems, and water figwort rising into dull pitcher-like flowers that gave out a disagreeable odour, grew. Closer to the brook were yellow mimulus, lovely blue forget-me-nots, and large bright-green bunches of sweet Cicely. Though so far away from human habitation, daffodils carried down by the stream had rooted and flowered in the shingle. These were a very few from all that grew there, chosen because their brighter tints first met the eye; but a closer search revealed many more, deeper in the grass. Each succeeding piece of waste-ground reproduced the same abundance, and filled the heart with an ever new delight.

Higher up the scene grew wilder and more

remote. Abrupter uplands shut out the country around. In the thickets and wood-clad slopes was abundance of bird life. Along the brook the sandpiper flew with noisy piping flight. Every year a pair of grey wagtails nested in one of its banks, the male bird hardly less beautiful in his glowing yellow and darker tints than the kingfisher, and unsurpassed among brook birds for graceful motions. It was always a pleasing sight to see him running over the shingle, full of life and activity, or rising into the air in pursuit of an insect. In the nesting season no other bird—unless it were the curlew—had such a sharp eye for an intruder, hailing every approach of possible danger with loud and piercing cries.

There were fewer moor-hens by the brook than by the stream, where thickets of bulrush and bur-reed gave them better cover. Still, some could always be seen, — in summer, often an old bird with a number of dark velvety young. The nest was placed under a bank or close to the water in an overhanging bush or tree. Occasionally a stranger site was chosen, for the moor-hen seems to love variety in its nesting-places as much as the redbreast. One season an old pail, brought down the brook by a flood, had rested bottom upward in a shallow, and on it a moor-hen had her large loose nest, safely bringing out her young.

The wooded steeps above the banks were honeycombed with rabbit-burrows. In the long evenings the meadows were alive with old and young rabbits

together. Other furred creatures found a home along the brook. On one walk I saw a three-parts grown rat hunted by a weasel. They dived and swam and rushed over the stones. Under the banks, across the stream, through the grass the hunt continued, each creature straining hard to attain its end. No sound came from either of them; and they were so excited as to be unconscious of everything about them. But as they drew closer—the hunted almost in the power of its remorseless pursuer—an abrupt movement caught the quick eye of the weasel. Immediately it left the water and rushed to the shelter of a thick bush. From the long grass beneath it made short quick rushes towards the path, hissing and shrieking its resentment. The rat meantime was using the unexpected respite to get as far from its dangerous enemy as possible. It appeared quite exhausted as it hurried down the stream, and probably for a brief space only was the weasel deprived of its hapless prey.

Winding and doubling by open field and wood-clad brae, past old wall and bushy thicket, from one fair natural garden to another as fair, now in sunshine, now in deep shadow, singing for very fulness of heart, the brook ascended. At one point of its course was a busy mill, and another village stood some distance higher, the houses extending along the sloping ground above the left bank. Here the charm of solitude and native wildness was some-

what broken, so many people came to the brook, for its course was everywhere beautiful. But rarely did one get as far up as the mill,—so much was lost by hurrying. More often a crescent-shaped belt of wood that hung over a bend of the stream was far enough. From the higher part of it the revolving, cone-like chimney-top of the mill could be seen over the trees. Close to the water the gently sloping bank, with its cool shadow and its undisturbed quiet, was always a temptation to rest for a time before returning. Wild strawberry plants, bearing white blossom and green fruit, covered part of the steeper slopes. Purple spring orchises lingered in the shadowy grass late into the hotter days of June. The stream murmured pleasantly as it made its way through a leafy tunnel. One of the kingfishers passed—a patch of shining colour between the branches—on its way to a higher reach of the brook. Willow-wrens sang their sweet love-song hidden in the thick foliage overhead. The mind was conscious of these things in the pauses and intervals of thought.

When it was time at last to turn again, though the path was the same the heart never wearied of it. Had there been a choice of many paths, I would rather have retraced this one, step by step, so much remained to be seen. Thus I could better understand the infinite detail, the unending variety of nature. By the brook alone there was enough to afford pleasure for many lifetimes. So I loved to

return on my steps, as a singer loves to repeat some sweet refrain. The only regret was that one could not visit the brook more often, that summer passed so soon, and that all the summers of a long lifetime were far too short to exhaust this little piece of nature. Yet often enough the dew was wet on the grass before I could leave it, and the last mail speeding westward, snorting and puffing and sending out fiery sparks, like one of the old dragons hurrying through the land on a mission of destruction.

THROUGH THE WOOD.

A GREEN lane divides two stretches of parish moorland; it marks the track of an older road that led to a market-place beyond the moors. An annual market is held there still, though it has lost all its early importance. In past days this was one of the largest gatherings of the kind over a wide district. Buyers and sellers came from far distances, and great numbers of horses, cattle, and sheep were brought to it along the old road. But the green track is all that is left of the once busy thoroughfare. Stray vagrants use it for their camping-ground; the smoke of their wood fires rises from it, and their miserable tents are set up under shelter of the trees and bushes along the sides. Broken-down horses and shaggy donkeys pasture on the sweet natural grass. The old track is given up to the vagrant tribe; in the neighbourhood it is known as "the tinklers' road."

Near one end a path leaves it and winds across one of the moors through furze, broom, tall heather, and dwarf trees to the wood. In springtime the moor is golden with blossoming furze. Before the

snows of winter have gone, a bush steals from the rising sun the Promethean flame. Another day it has spread to a second bush; by-and-by others kindle here and there until, presently, all the moor is aglow with the divine fire. Near the wood tall bushes of broom grow among the scattered firs and young spruce-trees. The broom flowers later than the furze, though some bushes of both are often in flower together. The green twigs of the broom are hidden beneath the flaming yellow of the blossom. By the wood broom and furze grow side by side. The eye can mark, through contrast, a difference of hue in the flowers. The ruddy sheaths that cover part of them give the furze blossom a deeper orange.

The path enters the wood through an opening in the turf embankment. On the right it joins an avenue. Here, in the warm days of June, winter-chickweed opens its lovely petals, delicate starry-white, in the cool shadow of the trees. Quite near, where the ground is more marshy, blue bugle-flowers grow. Part of the wood is open; a storm some years ago levelled all the trees. The ground is covered with trunks and branches of fallen spruces. Some have been uprooted, others broken near the ground; several trunks are snapped higher up, and rise into the air like shattered masts. A little distance from the path the great gusts had exhausted their force; there a branch or two are broken, but farther away the woody phalanx remains

uninjured. The fallen trees are the nameless heroes of the wood that fell in the shock of battle; they have given their life for home and country. Even in decay they are useful still; the wild creatures find shelter among them, and rear their young in the close covert they have made. In the evening the crow of the pheasant comes from them, and the opener parts are alive with rabbits.

Stay! there is a roe-deer in front of us. We just get a rapid glance of it before it disappears in the wood. Step gently along the avenue; there are always roe-deer about, and the snapping of a dry twig sends them off at once in alarm. Without some woodcraft all that we shall see of most of them is the fleck of a white tail among the trees. One day five crossed the avenue; they were so near that you could see the quick, nervous expression of the dark eye. Two of them were rich chestnut bucks with nice horns. They stood in the open to regard the intruders, and then bounded with short leaps into the wood. At sunset they feed quietly in the grass of the avenues, and along the narrow cross-paths you can get quite close without disturbing them. When sheep come to the wood in winter roe-deer pasture freely with them, and unless often hunted, seem to have little dread of the dogs. Sometimes a fawn wanders into the bushes by the moor. One, hardly larger than a hare, but graceful as a gazelle, strayed into a belt of birch-trees farther away. On one side was the open

moor, on the other a fence too high for jumping. Using every available bit of cover, it tried to keep out of sight; at last it disappeared among some thick furze. What a lovely creature it was!—lithe, active, and spotted like a fallow-deer. At this age the young run some risk from poaching dogs. Old roe-deer visit the corn and turnip fields evening and early morning, frequently paying the penalty with their life. The head is mounted in the farmer's room, and there is an interesting story connected with the stalk, though he does not always care to tell it. Notwithstanding his right to protect his crops against the encroachments of all ground-game, he is afraid it might make bad feeling between himself and his landlord.

The avenue takes us into the wood, crossing some streamlets bridged with tree-trunks. Right before us is a perfect woodland picture. The path is vivid green, with short grass that hardly feels the scorching rays of the sun; tall spruces rise on both sides, so near as to leave but a narrow pathway of blue, cloud-flecked sky above them. The older green of the spruce branches is covered with fresh, light-green shoots. Everything is intensely brilliant in its colouring, from the cool green of the mosses under the trees and the lighter green of the grass, up the living walls of spruce-tree green to the blue depths and the fleecy cloudlets overhead.

It is all so peaceful, the few woodland sounds hardly break the stillness. A blackbird is singing

in a glade behind the spruces. The wood gives a delicious flavour to the melody of his song. Again and again his notes sound in the stillness, full-throated and luscious as a nightingale's; their constant repetition brings no sense of monotony. Some tits and golden-crested wrens are calling among the fir-trees; the shrill *che-chees*, like the call of the curlew among the mountains, are the voice of the loneliness and wildness of the wood.

Let us take this little pathway to the left; a stranger would hardly find it. We have to push aside the branches as we go. On one side of the narrow path are opener firs, on the other dense spruces. Through the upper boughs shafts of soft orange light penetrate; lower there is a deep twilight all the day. The branches a good way up the crowded spruce-trees are withered and dead. The pathway, after a short course, ends in another glade; it is really a little circle of blown timber, a Flodden in the woodland strife. You find it hard to explain; all around the blown part are the other trees of the wood, sheltering it on every side, apparently untouched. The blast that overturned the fallen timber must have been a strong whirlwind, an eddy in the tempest descending from above. On the ground before us, as in a book, the storm has written part of its history.

Ferns are growing all over the glade,—broad-buckler, polypody, lady, and male. Under the branches of a fallen tree are some delicate oak-

ferns, and near them green leaves of marsh pennywort. Crossing the opening, we can return to the avenue through the thick spruces another way. The silence has grown oppressive; there is a feeling of detachment from everything; extremes meet; it resembles the feeling which rises in a strange crowd.

Some of the trees have failed to push their way through the thicket of branches above; living in the constant twilight, they have become great, thick bushes. The shadow and the struggle of their existence have influenced them strangely. The sprays are not flattened laterally like those of spruce-trees under happier auspices; they are narrow and rounded, with short spikes of leaves.

The dense growth and the stillness suggest some primeval age; the stunted spruces recall young trees of the old coal-measures. The wood in this part continues as it was planted; the trees have never been thinned. Every year the struggle for existence has grown sterner. A fallen trunk is covered with moss; outwardly it seems quite firm, but a stick goes into it without much resistance. The ground is imbedded with innumerable needles; it feels soft and peaty under the foot, which makes no sound. Outside in the glade are the thick ferns, and nearer, the strange spruce branches. The imagination overpowers the judgment; the past steals upon the soul. Under the shadow of the dense spruces is a glamour, a mystery. Some reptilic

creature of the past may creep from them; it would only be in keeping with this weird and silent side of the wood.

Beneath the fir-trees is the scene of a woodland tragedy. Light-blue feathers are scattered over the ground, and a dead wood-pigeon lies near them. There are large gashes on the neck and on the back; the bird has been the victim of some relentless sparrow-hawk. One can see it all,—the chase in the open, the doubling among the trees, the untiring pursuit, and at last the fatal stroke. Dead doves are often found in the wood, many of them, like this one, entirely uneaten; they have been struck down for the mere lust of killing.

But now, leaving the deeper shadow, let us enter this pathway on the other side of the avenue; it is better defined than the one we have left,—a soft mossy pathway, in every shade of green, that feels delightful to walk upon. The ground is covered with tender spruce tips, cut by the squirrels from the trees above. Numbers of large, elongated cones are lying by the path. A shallow stream crosses it, clear as crystal; and, bending, you can see the faint gleam of its water under the thick branches.

The pathway joins another avenue, from which the edge of the wood, on the side of the fields, is visible. Across the end of it is a single row of trees. The little opening might be a latticed window in some temple of nature; the thicker trees of the wood are the enclosing walls, the single ones across

the avenue the mullions, and the interlacing branches the lattice-work. When the sun is setting behind the fields, and the saffron or rose-tinted rays are streaming through this opening, the resemblance is almost complete.

Farther along we cross the winding stream again. In front the path reaches so far that the wooded sides appear to meet in the distance. It is a long, cloistered walk, green and cool from the moist mosses and the deep shadow. A fresh and healthy fragrance fills it, the exhalations of innumerable trees. Near the pathway a convenient pile of wood, cut years ago, is lying; and, sitting on it, we are within the sound of the softly murmuring stream. Two ring-doves are cooing near. *Coo-coo—coo-coo—coo-coo:* the plaintive notes are uttered with short pauses. The ring-dove ends each time with another note like the final note of the cuckoo, though less harsh; you cannot hear this final *cok* unless the bird be very near.

After each woodland sound comes a deeper interval of silence. The quiet is seldom broken by human intruders. Yet the public road skirts the whole length of the wood; neither fences nor walls make it difficult to enter; notice-boards do not warn the trespasser away. The very want of restriction preserves its sanctity better than anything else. Only the sportsman visits it in the season, and cottagers going to the nearest village cross it from the way of the fields. But here in this quiet

path no one will disturb us; everything ministers to sacred feeling and deep thought. These are the real hours of life, when we get nearest to its depths. To-morrow for the struggle again; but to-night, while the passing woodcocks call in the twilight, we shall linger until the spirit that dwells in the silence has strengthened and uplifted the soul.

WILD FLOWERS.

I.

HEAVY rains have beaten down the last of the leaves. From the window the trees no longer conceal the fields beyond them. A field-breadth away the flooded stream has overflowed its banks, and formed large standing pools of water in the sodden grass. An open ditch by the side of the nearest field is as brimful as the stream. No bright note of colour shows anywhere, colour seems dead like the fallen leaves. Above the skies are grey with rack that drifts steadily from the sea; the water that fills ditch and stream reflects the leaden grey of the clouds; all the vivid green has been washed out of the grass. Not a single flower can be seen; only some wreckage of ragwort stems remain to recall the life and abundance of summer.

But sitting here, with the fire diffusing a glow of warmth and good cheer through the room, the desolation outside brings back the past with all its colour and brightness vividly to the mind. For months, in the earlier year, every trace of water in

the ditch is hidden under a rich embroidery of wild flowers. On a bank that rises to the field wall alongside are clumps of yellow daffodils. Large gold cups of marsh marigolds make a sheen of colour beneath them right down to the stream. Cuckoo-flowers open their pink blossoms to the April sunshine. These, with lesser celandine, daisies in the field, and deep-blue ground ivy, are the first course in that feast of beauty which nature provides for man. Before they have passed, the later host of summer flowers have begun to push up tender young shoots from last year's withered herbage. Ruddy leaves of meadow-sweet, bluish-green leaves of giant valerian, and prickly leaves of marsh thistle—a few weeks of summer sunshine bring these and many more up with a rush. They cover ditch and bank, concealing most of the loose stone wall behind. From the doorsteps they show through the throbbing heat haze as a broad, blurred line of colour from the row of elm-trees where the ditch begins to the stream. The effect is very agreeable, —a pleasant impressionist picture painted by nature herself.

But crossing the field, the blur of colour resolves itself into the individual tints of a multitude of wild flowers. What a marvellous artist nature is! Here are colours of every kind, many of them, side by side, in hopeless contradiction of every criterion of human taste—blues and greens, yellows and pinks, mingled in apparent confusion. Yet there is no

loudness, no discord, nothing offensive to the best taste. A subtle influence always flows in, from the fields, from the air itself,—a light, a tone, a spirit that removes any harshness, and makes the most stubborn colours increase the beauty of the particular effect. Never was ribbon border in old garden more gay with colour than the ditch in the quivering summer light. Between it and the wall on the sloping bank are high meadow-sweet, square-stemmed St John's wort, giant valerian, marsh thistles that pass through every tint from creamy white to deep pinks, purple hardheads, angelica, now at their full height. In the field buttercups grow rankly, with pink flowers of ragged robin, and red bartsia elbowing the daisies. But it is the ditch itself, where the hidden moisture gives a lasting freshness to their petals, that the wild flowers love best of all. Here they are bunched together, filling every available bit of space,—white flowering cress, blue brooklime, bright forget-me-nots, lingering marsh marigolds, with other water-plants.

Along the banks of the stream the larger flowers of the ditch-side repeat themselves endlessly but never grow monotonous. At places, in a thin veil of seeding grasses, they overtop the wire fence. Nature reserves her largest and strongest plants until late in summer. They take longer to reach maturity, and are better fitted to assert themselves in the ever-increasing struggle of the year for air

and light, forcing their way with their strong, fibrous stems through the thick herbage about them. These are the oaks of the wild-flower world. After all the storms of winter, their lifeless stems rise into the air like shattered columns, until they get buried beneath the living green of another summer. Most of the low-stemmed wild flowers—primrose, celandine, dog-violet—appear early in the year, beautifying the short sward of spring. In this summer fulness they would be hidden altogether. So would the vetch-flowers, were it not for the hand-like tendrils with which they draw themselves up to the light.

Reaching from plant to plant and encircling the stronger stems, these bright-hued vetches suggest the creepers in a tropical forest. Nature reproduces herself along the same lines continually. Tall plumed grasses and immense thistles are the forest giants that tower over everything around them. Under their shade a more equal growth of bennets and wild flowers make the ordinary trees, and humbler growths the dense thicket of underwood. There is the same fulness of life, too. Bright-winged insects hover in the air; butterflies visit the flowers; large humble-bees buzz through the grasses, brushing the higher ones in their heavy flight; active little frog-hoppers leap from stem to stem. When the sun has set, droning beetles rise from the depths of the grasses where they have been hidden all the day; moths burr about the higher

tussocks, and bats hunt them through the summer night. As the foot brushes aside the matted growth, another world of active creatures hurry away from the light. Air above and earth beneath are teeming with busy life.

In the stream large, well-fed trout rise to the insects that play over its surface. For another season most of them are safe from the angler's fly, branched bur-reeds in some parts almost filling the channel. Lower in its course, where the stream disappears in a mound of green, great bulrushes have done this completely. Though the water flows a foot or more beneath the level of the banks, their strong stems are as high as the head. Moor-hen, water-vole, and trout find safe refuge among them: to all appearance they are impervious to larger creatures. Efforts have been made to uproot these bulrushes for the damage they do in filling up the bed of the stream; but year after year they come again in rank profusion, and are extending rapidly up and down. Though undesirable in this way, they have a beauty and an interest of their own. They are, far and away, the handsomest members of the rush order: their imposing height, and the distinctive willow-green of the long, lanceolate leaves, make a clump of bulrushes conspicuous a long way off. So thickly do they grow in the stream that the eye can see but a short way into them. They are too thick to allow other plants to grow among them, but where the stream enters, water-

plantain and blue-flowered marsh speedwell rise from it.

Near the bulrushes a low stone culvert carries the railway across the water. The large embankment rising from the fields is a rich garden of wild flowers. Crimson poppies cover patches of bare soil by the shunting ground with their flaming hues. In the grass of the embankment are breadths of yellow and blue from meadow vetchling and tufted vetch, gleams of white from marguerite and campion, of purple from the flowering stems of nettle-leaved bell-flower, and pale yellow from different hawkweeds. As far as one can see, the same bright tints, with others as bright, are reproduced inside the enclosing fences. The wild flowers love the embankment as they love the stream. Along its slopes a measure of protection is afforded them that they find in few other places. Year by year they are allowed to reach maturity and seed freely. So the embankment has become a natural preserve for plant life; some that cultivation and other causes have made uncommon elsewhere are still found on it. Then the railway passes through every kind of soil and every form of scenery, by marsh and meadowland, through woodland and steep rock cutting, along the seashore and high up among the hills, so that it has a widely varied flora.

For the nature lover, the wild plants that cover the embankments with flower in their season make no small part of the pleasure of a journey by rail.

He learns to look for them all,—cowslip, primrose, and bluebell in the springtime; may, dog-rose, with all the sweet variety of summer blossom, to the last lingering hardhead of the year. A vision of wild flowers passes him, fleeting as the speed of the rapid train, and yet accompanying him all the way. In perfect comfort of easy motion he is borne along a never-ending pathway, between two flower borders set in a background of ever-changing scene. Through the open window the breeze carries the fragrance of summer from wild flower, leaf, and meadow hay.

One is glad to say a good word for the railway on this side alone. It adds to the beauty of the landscape through that stripe of wild nature which the permanent way preserves wherever it goes. Here the flowers with their brightness of colour and pleasing variety detract from the feeling of monotony that constantly repeated cultivated fields at last produce. Nor must it be forgotten that the railway serves one of the highest purposes of art, which is most noble when most human and unselfish: it has opened up beautiful reaches of the country to multitudes who could never otherwise see them. To the real artist who looks at the question from its widest aspect, the network of rail that covers the country, with the rapid trains that come and go like a dream, instead of defacing, sensibly enrich the landscape by introducing a new thought which nature is fast making a part of herself.

II.

In spring the smaller moors in the parish are agleam with gorse, but otherwise there is little promise of their great wealth of later blossom. With the approach of June it begins to show more, every sunny day bringing a larger variety of plant life into flower, and about mid-June the floral tide is rapidly reaching its height.

Now is the time to visit them, when the year has reached the fulness of summer without losing the freshness of spring. Willow-wrens sing their low sweet song from the birch-trees. All over the moorland they are very abundant, and, in early summer, more of them may be heard singing than of any other bird. From a bush of heather or a grey-lichened stone the plain brown meadow-pipit repeats its plaintive call. Sometimes the note passes into a continuous shrilling sound not unlike that made by the grasshopper, though much louder and more musical. Other birds are singing sweetly, and the eye meets bright notes of colour wherever it turns; the year is at its happiest time.

Between the road and the moor is a spot—the only one in the parish — where the melancholy plume-thistle grows. Near it Pyrola minor has begun to open its rosy-flushed petals in the fresh green grass. The short stem, clad on its upper part with delicate flower-bells, gives it the appear-

ance of a wild lily of the valley. Not only here but in the shadier parts of one of the moors there is a good deal of it.

A green track with beeches on one side and young firs on the other joins the road from the moorland. Along it the wild flowers are in great variety, among them several orchises. But instead of following the soft green path in the middle of the track we shall cross the narrow patch of moorland on the farther side. On a sparsely covered piece of ground milkwort is creeping all over the surface. Within a few yards are four differently tinted varieties in full flower—pink, light blue, deep blue, and pure white.

On this part of the moor a saw-mill has once stood; some of the fast-decaying stumps rise from the heather on every side. Though more than twelve years since the wood was cut, a barren part still shows where the sawdust has quite extinguished plant life. Round it has grown a fringe of sheep-sorrel, ruddy in the sunlight.

In the long heath we have to walk carefully, for some of the fir stems have been uprooted and make awkward pitfalls for unwary feet. Whortleberry bushes grow plentifully in parts, and are covered with tiny pink balls of blossom; but the ground is too open and poor for fruit.

Young birches give out a pleasant fragrance as they are brushed aside. Beyond them, on the side of the moor that bounds the fields, stretches a long,

narrow belt of larger birch-trees. Under their light shadow ferns and other wildings grow freely. A bank is yellow with rock-rose, another stray plant that has found root here.

What are the conditions that determine the appearance and growth of wild flowers in certain places? Birds and winds are no doubt the great agents in distributing the seed. But apart from this, what explains their alternate disappearance and reappearance in the same place? Multitudes of living plant germs appear to lie dormant in almost every part of the earth until the conditions come that are favourable to their growth. In the fields some weeds — such as wild mustard, poppy, or corn-cockle—have a special fondness for particular crops, and remain inactive through others. Certain seasons are more favourable to certain plants, and bring them up in abundance. The rock-rose, under the light-stemmed birches, was very wayward; sometimes several years passed without its delicate waxen petals showing, and then the whole bank was bright with them—a more vivid tint than the golden yellow of the buttercup.

An open ditch with a wall that is often nothing more than a mossed bank extends along the field-side. Graceful fronds of newly uncoiled fern — broad-buckler, lady, and hard ferns—cover it, and hang over the lesser spearwort, with its yellow flowers, in the water below. Orchises scent the air at the edge of the birches. Purple-flowered

marsh and dwarf rattle are both found on the moor, and a profusion of yellow rattle by the road that passes it.

The greater part of this road has never been repaired, so that it is little better than a rough track, though it must have been used for centuries: in places it has sunk deep beneath the surface soil with the constant passage of man and beast. Here and there it might be a torrent-bed, large boulders projecting from it. Farther on it passes over stiff clay, and becomes practically impassable in winter unless during hard frost. Vehicles occasionally use the moorland road, though it is not safe for them: last year a serious accident occurred through the jolting of a cart. On either side are fields that have been reclaimed from the moor, but the soil is so poor and hungry that it hardly repays the toil of cultivation.

The plants show this as much as anything, being most of them moorland ones, and such as love a poor soil — rattles, sneezewort, self-heal, mountain groundsel, and others of the same kind. The fields on the left hand gradually pass into moor and marsh land again; on the other is a single grass field, and beyond it a rushy meadow has been allowed to become part of the piece of moorland we are seeking. In the meadow are wild flowers without end; it is as gay with them as an Alpine one. They bloom everywhere, and of almost every hue, a rich tracery of petal and leaf on the

green of the meadow. One of the most conspicuous is the globe-flower; its golden balls of blossom rise above the rushes. Four species of orchis are within sight at once, the spotted one in great abundance. It varies more than any of the others; each flowered head seems to assert its own individuality of appearance. More fragile and delicate spikes of flower show among them, white with just a conscious flush of green. These belong to the lesser butterfly orchis, and when freshly gathered give off a pleasant perfume. But for sweet fragrance they are not to be compared with the rose-coloured orchis—a gymnadenia—near them. Another is the deep-purple early one, which grows more plentifully close to the road. Soon the meadow passes into the heather of the moor, with a profusion of yellow tormentil and petty whin in the opener parts.

Some one has attempted to quarry the underlying flagstone rock. The stone had been unsatisfactory, and the work was soon stopped; but a deep hollow, surrounded with dwarf willows, raspberry bushes, and flowering broom, remains to mark the place. Looking down upon it, the surface of the water that half-fills the hollow is white on one side with water-crowfoot blossom. The flowers, like those of so many other aquatic plants, are not meant to be gathered, they decay so soon. As much as the water-lily, too, they need the background of the water for full effect. These crowfoot flowers, float-

ing in the midst of their buttercup leaves, white petalled with yellow centres, are a study in dainty lines and colouring. From the moor a dragon-fly came and remained for a time over the water, darting, then hovering, and darting again. He was smaller than the ordinary kind, and both body and wings gleamed with delicate blue tints.

Above the moorland beyond the road curlews are shrieking their anxious cries; every year they nest in an open part of it. Their pleasant love-notes of the springtime, when the bird rises into the air, tenderly calling its own name, and alights again with outstretched wings on some bare hillock, are now seldom heard. So is the call of the cuckoo; silent as a shadow the bird leaves an alder copse, and flies close to the ground with a rapid flight.

Dark masses of pine wood on the large moor to the north appear to reach the blue hills behind them. A wide country lies between; but in the clear summer air the impression of nearness from the towering hills has become so vivid, and of large extent from so many trees, that the farthest reaches of the wood apparently cover the lower slopes of the hills. Their great rounded masses look very cool and inviting in the bright sunshine of a hot summer day.

But the foot had almost stepped on a hidden partridge. With noisy flutter the mother bird rose from the heather, to light quite close again in a highly excited state. Her feathers are puffed out,

and now, with the dragging wing of a wounded bird, she tries to tempt pursuit. At the sound of her first cluck of alarm the cheep, cheep of the young has sunk into sudden silence, though all around and quite close the eye has to search carefully enough to detect them among the moss, lichen, and grey stones. The first hurried survey revealed no sight of life; but there, at last, is one small downy creature cowering under a bunch of heather, its mottled shades of dark-brown and yellow as pretty an instance of assimilation as one could well wish.

Near the edge of the moor are a number of plants of butterwort. It grows profusely by the moister parts; so does the sundew, another insectivorous plant. Some patches of bare soil among the heather are ruddy with the hairy, rounded leaves of the latter. The small white flowers have not opened yet, but there are deep-blue, violet-like ones, rising from the light-green leaves of the butterwort.

One finds it hard to believe that a plant almost as modest and gentle to all appearance as the violet itself, should be guilty of insect life. An air of innocence surrounds the butterwort that appeals to the kindliest sentiments of the heart. Here one would fain discredit the evidence of the senses and give the plant the benefit of any doubt. But unfortunately there is none whatever to give; the evidences of its guilt are too patent, and the butterwort nothing more, at best, than the proverbial

sheep in wolf's clothing. A sticky fluid adheres to the fingers when they touch the pale-green harmless-looking leaves. Its purpose is apparent enough: on some are numbers of small insects quite dead, and to complete the damaging chain, living flies are struggling hard but fruitlessly to get away from the fatal juice.

With the sundew, at least, there is no cant, no hiding a murderous spirit under a harmless-looking exterior. A low-type criminal, so far as its features go, it may be, but at least it honestly carries its character in its face. The black flag of rapine floats over it; the mark of the slayer is on its brow; heredity has cursed it through a thousand generations; there can be no mistaking its savage lust for blood. The very appearance of the plant is fleshy, suggesting the thought of all the victims it has devoured. These slender-looking, bristling hairs are, in all reality, medusa arms, meant to strangle insect life, without any hope of escape from their deadly embrace.

Yet the sundew, for all its slaughterous proclivities, is a most interesting plant. You could almost fancy, as you get to know it better, it was able to exercise powers of conscious thought. When an insect touches a leaf, watch how fast the hairs grasp it, and, by a kind of muscular action, pull it farther and farther within the fatal folds. But now let a piece of wood or soil of about the same size be put on another leaf. For a moment the plant appears

to be deceived, but the next one the hairs begin to reverse their first action, working hard to get it thrown off the leaf. Dead flies, when the sundew has sucked their juices, are ejected in the same way. The globules of gummy moisture that glisten in the sunshine and give the plant its name, aid the action of the hairs in securing its insect victims.

One day, on this bit of moorland, we found a new wild flower. Common enough to the professed botanist, our eye had never consciously seen it before. It suddenly sprang up with all the force of a new creation. The discovery of it—for it was a discovery—brought both surprise and joy. The heart shared the joy of the man who first found it and gave it a name. Part of this joy came from novelty of impression and the feeling of wonder that it had been hidden so long. The footsteps had passed it all unconsciously times without number. Season by season it made its mute appeal in vain to the eye. But now that it was once seen, both here and in other places, the strange wild flower seemed to have grown up in a night. It had come into the field of consciousness like a sweet thought from life's unknown depths. So one day shall the new world of poet and prophet's dream come out of the old, when the eyes are opened to the multitude of details and beauties that lie hidden about us now. The things that are unseen will transfigure and glorify the things that we see.

STRAY SKETCHES.

I.

A PLANTATION of spruce, Scots fir, and aspen has sprung up about the pond in the fields. The trees are quite young, but tall enough to hide the water from the public road. Shrubs have been planted among them, and in summer the opener ground is overgrown with tall grasses and white-flowered campions. Here the first sedge-warbler of the season sings; by the end of May several of these birds are all in song within a short distance of one another.

Though quite near the road where people pass continually, the trees and thickets of bushes, with the hollow in which it lies, give the pond that air of seclusion which wild creatures love. Waterfowl swim leisurely over its surface or stray through the grass near it in conscious security. The pond is a favourite resort of wild duck, and some half-wild white ones—much smaller than the duck of the farmyard—are kept as decoy birds. With the change of the leaf, a sportsman can always be

sure of a few shots from the dense cover of bush and tree. He is practically invisible from the water, and when put up at last by the reports of his gun, the wild birds circle in the air with the tamer duck, returning again and again within the fatal line of fire.

A high fence of wire-netting above a loose stone wall protects this natural sanctuary on the side of the road. But at one place is a small wicket-gate with a notice-board jealously warning trespassers away. Stooping down to avoid the netting above, we entered here one summer evening when the nesting season was almost over.

From the gateway a winding grassy path led through the young trees; a few steps along it all was secluded and still. Through a break in the foliage a narrow inlet from the pond came in sight. Two coots were swimming here, followed by a number of dark-coloured young. The soft complacent notes of the old birds gave expression to the family happiness. A movement in the bushes made a wild duck near them lead her brood rapidly among the reeds.

The body of the pond was still out of sight; but pushing through matted grass and rapidly closing foliage, it appeared glancing in the sunshine. The year had almost reached its fulness. About the pond, and stretching into the water, was a perfect forest of growth. From the muddly shallows rose tall mare's-tails with dark-pointed heads. Beyond

them were taller, plumed, reedy grasses and branched bur-reeds. Giant bulrushes along the farther side overshadowed all the other water-plants, and near them were thick clumps of iris leaves with bright yellow flowers. At one spot an island of vegetation, bound together by thick-matted roots of iris, had formed a short way from the dense growth by the edge of the pond. Overhanging willows clothed the banks, and on the opener slopes among the trees the broom was still in flower.

With the summer sky overhead, and this rich luxuriance of nature around, all sense of locality was lost by the mind. The pond might have been a quiet pool of some tropical river where human footsteps seldom strayed. There was something virgin and primeval about it. Calm as a mirror, it slumbered in the midst of its own richness and beauty.

A sharp-sighted heron rose over the trees with wide sweeps, but on the water itself the birds swam undisturbed. Close to the reeds a teal drake preened his feathers, unconscious of human intrusion, the light gleaming from his cinnamon head and beautiful wings. A pair of tufted duck floated slowly nearer the centre of the pond. The drake was so close one could see the changing lustre of the feathers and the tiny dark plume falling on his well-shaped neck. The very eyes with their golden iris, glittering, expressive, were quite visible. Most of the other birds on the pond were occupied with more unselfish cares.

Insect life filled the warm air. Over the surface of the water swarming gnats danced in a mazy circular motion. Straying humble-bees made their deep droning sound as they flew through the trees and long grasses in uncertain flight. The pond, with the wood and the wild flowers, afforded a shelter for an endless host of creatures. The eye saw them, the ear heard them, and subtler intimations of their presence came through some undefined sense. The heart breathed the vital atmosphere, and was filled with the quickening influence of a wider life. The same joy came to it from the presence of this living multitude as rises in the throng of the city crowd.

By one end of the pond the ground was opener: from its short sward purple spring orchises grew. The flowers had no scent, but they were large and lovely, spotted and marbled with deep purple on a lighter purple ground. White campions flowered richly among them, — the bladder campion, a different plant from the taller white campions by the road: their leaves were more smooth and bluish-green. Bird's-foot trefoil covered a gravelly bank, and made a rich carpet of crimson and gold. Where another inlet left the pond rhododendron flowers were reflected—both form and colour—in the calm waters.

Teeming life filled the earth as well as the water and the air. Countless children drew vital being and nourishment from her, and grew beautiful in

the sunshine: a happy mother, she rejoiced with them all. A halo of light and life and beauty transfigured the old earth. It was the time of green leaf and wild flower, the season of the year when love thrills everything with the promise of near fruition. Outside the pond enclosure a sweet-briar had begun to open its dainty pink roses, and thale cress, hedge parsley, bush vetch, stitchwort, with a great many other wild flowers, were growing by the sides of the public way.

II.

On the other side from the plantation grass fields, with pasturing cattle, skirt the road. In the nearest one is a natural indentation, where a large standing pool lies until summer is well advanced. Swallows come to it for mud to build their nests and dip in its waters. Often in spring a pair of shoveller duck may be seen on it: they will nest presently near the pond among the trees. Lapwings and redshanks bring their young as soon as they are hatched: downy balls, full of life and motion, they run round the edges of the pool or wade into the water. The old birds call anxiously when people are passing, but the very publicity of the place makes it safe.

Past this smaller pond, past a farmhouse with well-kept garden, the way leads. It climbs the hill by a row of large beeches; one tree almost touches the opposite bank with its long sweeping branches,

and forms a deep and well-shaped arch of leaves over the road. To the left another road leaves the main one to cross a wooded den. Deep-set in hedges and spreading trees, with wide grassy margins, it is more of a lane than a road. Many of the beeches that rise from a bank on one side are beautiful trees with short stems breaking into a number of limbs clothed above with densest foliage.

Under shadow of these for a short way, and along the avenue to the old castle among its lofty lime-trees that crowns the nearer slope, close to the place where the den opens to the fields beneath. High up in the turrets are openings once used for defensive purposes. Indoors the dungeon remains, very much the same as when it may have been last used, and a narrow winding stone staircase leading from the lower to the upper rooms is another link with the past. But otherwise the castle has entirely lost its ancient warlike character. Creepers cover the lower part of it, bright in their season with festoons and clusters of flowers. On either side of the door are carefully kept borders with a constant succession of pleasing colours. The castle itself looks down on the lawn, and all the summer through on the happy pastimes of a peaceful age.

Beneath it, on the farther side, is the garden descending a steep slope to the den stream. Outside one of its walls is a small orchard, and beyond the wilder part of the den. Here large trees climb the high receding banks, and spread their branches

far above to form a refreshing shade. They are crowded with rooks' nests: there has been a rookery in the den trees time out of mind. Though many are destroyed every season, the birds return in spring in undiminished numbers, and all through the nesting-time one of the pleasantest sounds by the castle door is their breezy cawing.

A clear woodland stream babbles down the den. Between banks of soft green moss it hurries restlessly, fretting at one place a tiny gravel precipice, at another breaking against a rounded stone or gliding over sand and pebbles. There is a strange fascination about the murmuring sound of the stream. It seems to have a secret that it cannot put into definite speech. Once and again it struggles to find a voice, as some human being in deep distress, but the sound always dies away with a sobbing, gurgling murmur in the throat. Listen longer in the quiet of the woodland den and you become conscious of rests, and swells, and rhythmic turns. Like sweet melodies deftly touched to life by human fingers, the liquid notes pass through the whole range of man's experience, its sunshine and shadow alike. Now they are glad as the babbling of childhood or echoes of sunny laughter; by-and-by they grow more serious and complaining, as if burdened old age were seeking to express its trouble through them. Just as the stream glides from shadow into sunshine and then into dappled shade again, so seems to change the

melody of its tinkling notes and the hidden thoughts that they conceal. You cannot tell when the change comes, and whether it has its cause in the heart or the stream. So much of it must be in nature outside of you and so much in yourself, but you cannot fix a dividing line.

The listening spirit seeks to interpret the mysterious babbling of the water. Now loud, now faint, rising and falling, from swells to pauses, the ever-changing notes have a meaning for it: they express a deep thought which it ever strives to put into more familiar speech.

In the tall trees the squirrels play. One more venturesome comes to the ground, then goes up the tree again in short alarmed rushes, uttering sharp, shrill sounds. On the stump of a broken branch it twists its bushy tail with a longer note, apparently one of security and satisfaction. *Kerchunk!* It uttered the sound again, and disappeared in the thicker branches above. There it has evidently disturbed a chaffinch, for a torrent of angry pinking notes comes down from the tree.

What exactly are the relations between the squirrel and the birds? Not always friendly, one may safely say. On an earlier evening two thrushes followed a squirrel with every mark of hostility. One of the birds was specially vindictive: from branch to branch of a spruce-tree it chased the squirrel, attacking it with wings and beak. The furred creature did not wait to make any defence,

but fled with a haste that must have arisen from an evil conscience.

In spring primroses star every bank and hollow of the den; it is one of their best-loved haunts. Snowy patches of anemones glisten among the trees. Celandines flower abundantly, and on the moist banks of the stream the golden saxifrage grows. In one part blue scentless violets spring from the greensward, and all about them the white flowers of the wild strawberry. Blue and white, in a setting of green, they form a pretty harmony.

The path leads out into the open by a narrow meadow that follows the windings of the stream. This meadow is really part of the den, which has expanded on one side to embrace it. The other slope still rises abruptly from the water, and is planted thickly with firs and larches. On that side, where the stream winds round part of the meadow, a small tributary joins it. You can see along the little den tunnelled deep through pine-trees. Here in the season primroses gleam from the deep shadow like electric lamps. A few weeks ago they were at their best. The fresh green of some larches higher up the stream increased the beauty of those that grew under them on the steep bank. Beyond the trees the bare slope was covered with them. Single flowers and shining constellations, they made a perfect milky-way of primrose blossom. By this flower-covered bank is a busy mill, and past it the path rises to join the road again.

III.

The avenue that leads to one of our mansion-houses crosses in its course a marshy hollow, which has been spanned in part by a high stone bridge. Here the passer is tempted to linger, for the sylvan view from the parapet, in autumn especially, is worth coming a long distance to see. Flat, marshy ground—several acres of it—reaches on every side to well-wooded slopes. The whole has made a basin that must have been the bed of an old loch. A chain of these depressions, a good depth below the level of the country about them, reaches westward to the larger lochs. They have all been full of water, though they are wooded now and make excellent cover for game: for their extent, this chain of old lake-beds afford the largest and most varied bag anywhere around. The less accessible parts make an excellent sanctuary for wild creatures of every kind.

In the cover of the marshy ground below the bridge several pairs of shoveller duck and mallard nest every season. One year jacksnipe haunted it so late that it seemed possible they too might have stayed to nest. Here and there are small pools of water with flowering bogbean and marsh cinquefoil. In summer reedy grasses, meadow-sweet, and other plants grow; where the ground is firm enough these are cut before the end of the season and carted

away for farmyard bedding. Through winter, from slope to slope the flat hollow is deep in water.

On the lower side of the bridge there has been some attempt at draining the hollow by an open waterway, yellow in summer with iris flowers. In places large thickets of sallow grow, and rank bog myrtle among the sedges. Lower down the waterway passes through a loch that fills the hollow, not extensive but very deep.

Here three of us sometimes came in the summer evening from the mansion-house that stood in the wood above. Our love of nature was a common tie, and night by night it took us to the loch about the time of the woodcock flight. There was a charm about the place, its native wildness made it so secluded and restful. Many of the rarer creatures that visited the district found out the quiet loch in the wood. Others came at far intervals, but sooner or later they strayed into the stream again and were shot. Kingfishers have been seen perched on a dead branch by the side of it. One of the treasures of the house to its naturalist owner is a bittern that once fell to his gun: he had heard its *booming* cries, and shot it as it rose from the reedy grasses. Woodcock are very fond of the marshy valley; more of them frequent it than any place in the locality outside the moorland wood.

The sun had set more than an hour one evening when we started for the loch, though the sky to the north-west was still aglow with his light. Walking

Indian file along a narrow pathway among the trees on the slope of the valley, we soon reached it deep-set in the wood. A small pier of wooden piles ran out to the opener water and made the ground passable. The surface of the pond was perfectly calm but for occasional ripples that here and there broke its glassy stillness. Watching closely, we found that these were made by eels rising to some food that floated on the water. Several came to the surface quite near where we stood: we could mark the dark, snaky bodies rising from the depths below, opening and closing their mouths on food too small to be seen, and then disappearing again. All over the pool they rose, some of them very large.

Along the piles a narrow waterway had been made to the boat-house. Out through the reeds we pushed the boat to the deeper water by the head of the pier. We had brought two rods for pike, but the loch was hopelessly still. The boat was rowed within cast of the margin, but nothing touched us, though we knew there were monster pike in the depths beneath. The motion of the boat and the splashing minnow disturbed the many eels, and we saw no more of them that night.

A visible vapour rose from the loch and the marsh around: floating through the trees, it changed to a transparent, hazy blue, and disappeared at last above the fields. The sky was quite cloudless—only the larger stars were visible; they, too, looked pale in the clear radiance of the summer night. Earlier

the colouring had been exquisite, hue melting into hue in ever-changing gradation. From silvery lights above the west it passed through orange and pink to pale blue, and then through every shade of blue to the deepest blue in the east. There were tints so delicate that the mind was just conscious of them and nothing more: it caught them and lost them again as the eye gazed. Now all these had passed, and, unless for the glow over the hidden sun, the sky was a steely-blue from zenith to horizon. The uniformity of colouring gave it the appearance of being more solid and tangible: it might have been a great rounded roof of crystalline glass.

The loch had a deep margin of tall reeds that enclosed it on every side, with one small opening where the pier stood. Nearer than the reeds were broad leaves of water-lilies floating on the waters, their dark-green lit up by the chalice flowers that nestled among them. The night was perfectly still; not a leaf nor a blade of grass stirred in the wood. Tree behind tree, in all the fulness of their summer leafage, the fresh green beeches climbed the slope. A line of fir-trees by the edge of the field stood out rounded masses against the light.

We had given up the fruitless task of fishing. The boat drifted idly on the loch: water is never perfectly at rest. For another hour we sat enjoying the silence and beauty of the night. As with a garment we were wrapped round about with the stillness, a sacred stillness that we found it hard to

break with speech. The air about us was full of an invisible presence: we could feel it, just as we sometimes feel the presence of one we do not see. The Divine voice walked the earth again in the cool of the day.

This spiritual side of nature came closer to us than the more material, and all that was spiritual in us responded to it. When the voice ceased to speak, the heart's own thoughts became a voice. The spirit found itself in the deep stillness that revealed spirit in all about it. The time was ripe for revelations of higher truths; it became easy to understand how great souls were formed and trained in solitary places.

In experiences like these the heart passes beyond time: it rises to higher levels of existence. Nature enters into silent sympathy with this deeper life, and out of her everyday scenes earth reveals all the possibilities of Eden.

Our climate is often fickle to the stranger, and gives him good reason for complaining of its grey, inhospitable skies. But were it as bad as he sometimes makes it, all the rain and snow of a long winter, all the chills of a cold spring, disagreeable days without number, were not too much to pay for the pure joy of coming at last to these hours in the long twilight of our Northern nights.

HOME FARM ROAD.

THERE is a charm of lowland scenery about Home Farm Road. The sheltering hedges and its sunny southern exposure give a warmth and closeness of atmosphere that is lowland, and so does the rich luxuriance of the vegetation alongside. Shadowy green lanes leading from it to the low wooded hill, hedges with trailing brambles and climbing roses between the fields, and a wealth of trees, produce the same feeling. The road and its setting are part of a typical English landscape that has strayed to our colder North like a warm current from some Southern sea.

Home Farm lies at the nearer end of it, with its old-fashioned, comfortable dwelling-house, its irregular gathering of farm buildings, and the large stackyard. You can't well call it beautiful, though there is a beauty, too, in the sense of fitness, which everything, down to the very farmyard mud, presents. A collie dog is seated by the front door; the ducks are quacking from a muddy pond; some pigeons and numerous fowls are pecking near the stables; and the genial farmer himself is talking to one of his farm

hands in the open courtyard. We feel on friendly terms with him at once as he comes to greet us, the kindly farmer face is such a warm welcome, and so are the keen grey eyes, brimming over with quiet humour. The strong shoulders have begun to stoop a little through the stress of years and life, the step is a good deal slower than it used to be, but the hearty laugh and the cheery talk belong to a young spirit. A good friend, a counsellor of sound judgment, a neighbour who makes life pleasanter for all about him, and our little country world a happier place,—this is the warm-hearted tenant of Home Farm. He can tell you the history of all the surrounding country, for he has lived in the old house by the road for many a year. He knows a good deal about game, too, and the ways of wild creatures generally, though the days are in the past when every dewy morning he took his gun by the field-side for the chance of a rabbit.

But the farmer is going to a field above the farmsteading to see his workers, and our road lies right in front of us. A long, dark, upright fence, shadowed by tall trees, bounds it on one side, and a hawthorn hedge with the hedged fields and the wooded hill on the other. Almost as far as we can see, the fence ends at a field gateway; beyond it hedges, with young oaks and sycamore-trees at short intervals, confine the road on both sides.

Close to the farm is a little natural garden. The scattered stones of a fallen wall are almost

hidden under dainty herb-robert flowers and yellow buttercups. Behind these a thick growth of colts-foot, woundwort, tall nettles, and taller angelica has shot up, and, for a background to it all, there is a mossy bank with rapidly uncurling ferns, crowned by wild roses, hawthorn, and oaks just into leaf.

The side of an open ditch has scattered clumps of orpine, with hoary-leaved stems hastening to form the purplish flowers. Burnet saxifrage grows in the grass under the shelter of the hedge, and bistort so rankly in one place that its dock-like leaves seem to have killed every other living thing. Along the grassy margin, and encroaching on the dust of the road, is sea-plantain, as much at home as in the short benty sward by the shore. But here, on the sloping bank, is another plant, rarer still in the district—the dusky crane's-bill. It first appeared four or five seasons ago, a small plant that has become the parent of several more. Every year the spreading crane's-bill, with its deep-cut leaves and beautiful purple flowers, brings back the joy that rose in the heart when it was first found.

These are some of the less common plants by Home Farm Road; of others there is no lack,—vetches, hawkweeds, trefoils, and St John's worts of different kinds, with many more that are showing their richest colours when the grasses have begun to seed.

Hawthorn flower is not quite over; some of it, ready to fall, has changed to a pinkish tint. The

laburnums are perfect cascades of drooping yellow blossom. But the wild rose—sweet-briar and dog-rose—is the favourite flower of Home Farm Road. In early summer, along the roadside and in the hedges among the fields, its white, light, and deeper pink flowers scatter their wealth of lavish beauty. One large bush by the help of a hawthorn-tree has risen to a great height, apparently almost twenty feet. A long slender branch has mounted above the tree itself to flaunt its flowery pennons, and bends over with its own weight. Lower down lovely white flowers nestle among the fresh leaves of the hawthorn. Trailing stems have made the hedges gay with blossom. The flowers appear to come pouring over from the other side; the hedges are the barriers that confine a sea of wild roses. Sorely taxed are they to keep them in, for constantly the flowery ocean tides rise above their leafy barriers to dash them with rose spray, and tiny runnels of roses run down their sides. Under one or two densely leaved sycamore-trees the dog-roses make the deep shadow quite bright with colour. Summer has reached the fulness of her glory with the wild rose; when its last flowers have fallen, the year is sensibly on the turn.

Where the dark fence ends, a small stream passes beneath the road. On the farther side from the hill, near the gateway, it has cut deep into a bank of clay. At the top of this cutting you can reach the channel by the help of the bushes, and walk along it; in

summer only a little rill of water trickles down. Above, the banks rise steeply—red clay with rounded pebbles and jagged stones, hard enough in some places to form a red conglomerate. There are no shells visible, but it is interesting to examine the clayey banks in a twilight of overhanging bushes and trees. The falling clay has exposed their roots, which are projecting from both sides over the channel.

Through the work of the stream we may get a glimpse into the geology of the country about us. The hill above is a mass of whinstone; in one of the fields of Home Farm is a disused whinstone quarry, while two others are still used for the repair of the roads. But here the Old Red Sandstone which formed the quarried slate on the other side of the hill has come to the surface again, and from it are formed the steep clay banks that confine the stream.

Long green lanes extend from the road half-way up the hill, dividing the fields. Inside their enclosing hedges is a thick growth of furze, with thistles, nettles, and cow-parsnip yearly narrowing the green track in the middle. Rabbits feed in the short, sweet grass of these little-used footpaths; pheasants stray along them, and find shelter in the rank tangle of wild plants and bushes. Near one lane a barred gate opens into a hayfield. Sweet-scented vernal grass has begun to give forth its peculiar fragrance. The whole field is gay with white feverfew, one of the commonest hay weeds.

To the lanes and the roadside, where brambles, sweet-briar bushes, wild plants, and grasses have sprung up under shelter of the hedge, whitethroats come every May. A little thicket of tall plants, half-buried in grass, raspberry canes above all, the bird loves most, and in their depths the airy nest, a round deep cup of dead grasses, is placed. These they find by the wayside, so that the whitethroat in summer is a common bird of the road. Several pairs frequent Home Farm Road, and long after most other birds are silent through the hotter July days the whitethroat may still be seen rising from the bushes above the hedge and the hayfield to pour out his hurried song. Churring and chit-chitting, with raised crest and watchful eye, through the nesting season the male bird becomes a regular scold. Seldom would his well-hid secret be discovered, were it not for his too evident anxiety to conceal it.

The hedge is one of the few places about where honeysuckle grows wild. In the time of flower the grass near the bushes gets beaten down by the feet of children, who gather fragrant bunches on their way home from school. The heads are often hard to pull, and a great many broken ones lie in the grass where they have been cast away.

Yellow broom blossom is lighter than the fading furze, but not so light as the blossom of the laburnums hanging over it. From the buttercups comes another shade of yellow: they make a long line of golden light on both sides of the road. Looking

along it between the hedges, with the densely leaved sycamore-trees in their most vivid green casting deep shadows, the imagination cannot put it into words, nature is always so much wider than man's speech. I try again and again, and every time brings a fresh disappointment, such a world more does the heart see and feel than the lips can express. You must see with eye and mind and heart to enjoy the full glory of a scene like this.

Beyond the hedges are loose stone walls. A field beneath the stream is lost for some distance among sedges, bulrushes, and bur-reeds. Stray pike from the loch find shelter among them, and do a good deal of damage to the trout before they are discovered and destroyed.

We must stand another minute to admire a quiet but lovely pastoral scene, and then get home again by the side of the railway. One of the fields on the hillside has narrowed to form a small grassy promontory abutting on the road. Between us and it is a wire fence, half-hidden in bushes. A row of oak trees with light-green and fawn-coloured young leaves, receding from the road, divides the narrow part of the field from another. Under these trees are tall bushes of furze, and broom in fullest flower. Beeches with breadths of foliage as vivid green as that of the sycamores by the road extend along the opposite side of the field to form an angle with the oaks. The field itself has scattered oak-trees, the bark frayed with the rubbing of cattle. Their leaves

and the grassy sward about show a rich greenish-gold tint in the soft afternoon light. Near the whins are a number of feeding rabbits, and a fleck of white shows where one is disappearing into the covert. Particoloured kine pasture quietly near the road. You can hear the sound of their browsing, everything is so still. In one of the oaks a blackbird is singing, and a lark above an opener part of the field.

SEA BREEZES.

A THICK cloud-veil drifting eastward, with the labouring sun behind it, the day looks none too promising for a run to the sea. All the morning it has been the same, with short, fleeting gleams of sunshine. The weather is in the balance, a hair-breadth may turn it either way. So are our thoughts of starting; but the fascination of the waves is too strong for us, and, spite of doubtful weather, we are soon speeding over the miles that lie between.

Summer has lost its first freshness, for the time is betwixt the hay and the harvest. Along the roadside the dust has settled thickly, and the grass looks shrivelled and brown with the long heat. But the country that we have to traverse is still full of interest,—hedged and walled fields with fast-maturing crops, and comfortable old farm-houses dropped among them, sloping uplands with feeding cattle, reaches of moorland and wood. Homely rather than striking, yet the eye finds a charm in its variety, and the abundant promise of the fields fills the mind with a feeling of quiet content.

What is lost in detail of the passing landscape is more than made up by breadth of view and constant change of scene, which has a larger detail of its own. Rapidly the road glides past beneath the hurrying wheel. So slight is the effort needed to keep up motion that we are hardly conscious of it, but seem to be borne by invisible powers over the country.

The last part of the road has to be traversed afoot, being little more than a field path. Though still out of sight, we can tell that the sea is near; the breath of its briny waves is all about us. To the top of the ridge, and there it lies beneath, one wide monotone of steely-grey under a cloudy sky.

The path follows a line of high cliffs, and descends abruptly to a fishing hamlet on the shore. A few well-built houses, with the sea in front and the enclosing cliffs behind, it is as isolated a place as could well be. The unending murmur of the waters, the moan and dash of the restless waves, the wail of the sea-bird, take the place of more inland sounds. Strong the houses must needs be, for they have to breast wintry tempests whose wild fury is unbroken by any sheltering height. So close are they that every stormy gale from the sea lashes the windows with driving spray. Between them and the rock-strewn shore a grass-grown track does duty for the hamlet street. Southwards the projecting cliffs give a very limited prospect, but on the other side they fall away to show a large sandy

bay with the red sandstone ruins of an ancient castle on a height above it.

Salmon-fishing is the mainstay of the inhabitants. A net reaches out into the sea beside the houses, traceable by the half-submerged stakes that keep it afloat, and ending farther out in the cage-like part where the fish are caught. Near it a small porpoise is turning and rolling idly for very joy of life.

The fisherman says that the fishing on the coast has fallen very much away. Some years ago the season's catch at the Ha'en was reckoned at a thousand fish; now it hardly realises half that number. Seals at times get into the nets in quest of fish, and do great damage, tearing their way out again with their strong flippers. A young seal was lately caught, and a full-sized one left stranded in another net on the sands of the bay.

But the large sandstone headland a little way south from the Ha'en is the real object of our journey. A grassy pathway follows the windings of the cliffs to reach it. Here the rocky coast culminates in the Red Head, a huge mass of sandstone and conglomerate. The cliffs project and retire to form a great scalloped border of stone fronting the sea, and from points the opposite face can be seen right down to the water, a sheer descent of three hundred feet.

The long grass near the edge of the cliffs is a perfect garden of wild plants. Beautiful as any cultivated flowers are some that make breadths and

clusters of vivid colour. A lovely dianthus—the maiden pink—grows so plentifully in places that you may pull a bunch simply by closing the hand about it. Yellow spikes of agrimony give forth a sweet-briar perfume, and where the ground falls away to the rocks, clustered bell-flower—another plant of the cliffs—is sending up its heavy masses of blue flowers. And here by the path is the first carline thistle we have seen, with typical thorny leaves and yellowish heads. We must stay to study some of its details: the thistle represents another creative thought seeking an expression and individuality of its own. The mind is richer for the eye having seen it; the carline thistle is another pathway to the heart of things. No searcher after truth ever found more pleasure in the discovery of a new fact, the tracing of a new law, than this plant has brought. To me form and individuality are inseparably connected. They both go deep into the roots of things, and so I believe that not one of all those numberless forms through which life has found expression in ages past or in ages to come can be utterly destroyed.

Fairest of all the flowers that brighten the grassy slopes are the crane's-bills. Two kinds grow side by side, and we hardly know which to admire most—the deep pink of the bloody crane's-bill, or the perfect blue of the meadow one. Were ever garden flowers so fair as these and others about them? But had ever garden flowers such glorious surroundings to

bring home their beauty to the heart? We could spend the summer day among them with the sea breeze fanning the face and the tardy sunshine sparkling on the waters.

A fast-descending hog-backed ridge carries the path down to the stony shore. Here new forms of plant life tempt us on—blue flowers of mountain-vetch and wood-vetch clothing the steep slopes in such abundance as to give them a light lavender tint. But the footway gets more difficult as it descends, until at last we have to use our hands as well as our feet.

Wild plants still, in undiminished variety; we cannot get away from them—yellow saxifrage, making the rocky ledges glow with sunny gleams; pink hemp-agrimony at the foot of the cliffs, just breaking into flower; rose-coloured campions; large stems of cow-parsnip; giant valerian; and among the rounded stones along the shore, sea-purslane and grey leaves of orache. Part of the precipitous rocks is clothed with ivy and flowering honeysuckle that human hands will never pluck.

From beneath one can better realise their lofty height. This may be done, too, by throwing a stone up them, which the most vigorous effort sends but a little way. The narrow ledges, protected by the beetling cliffs, provide herring-gulls with secure breeding-places. Many of their young can be seen wherever the rocks afford them a foothold, almost ready for flight. Numbers of them must fall every

season; there are several dead bodies at the bottom of the cliffs. But for their larger size they might be the young of wood-pigeons. Multitudes of old birds are near them, their white breasts showing out against the dingy red rock. The clapping of the hands sends them into the air, like a sudden drift of snowflakes, wailing, barking, and yelling with a deafening sound.

The peregrine has not been seen lately; but until a year or two ago he had his eyrie here, and bold climbers have taken the young. House-martins build their mud nests under projecting portions of the rock, and find safer refuge from the robbing sparrow. Some of the nests are almost as red as the stone they are attached to, from the colour of the clay that the bird has used in building. It may be a case of red being the prevalent hue of the soil around rather than of conscious assimilation, though it serves to make the nests very difficult to detect. The ubiquitous sparrow is here also,—we can hear his chissicking from the rocks. Abundance of crannies ready to his purpose removes all temptation to steal the martin's nest. The bright notes of a singing wren mingle with the plash of the waves. These familiar birds of the house are strangely out of place amid such surroundings. Not so the yellow-hammer that repeats his melancholy plaint from a bushy thicket. The song seems in sympathy with the mystery of the murmuring waters—"Sea, sea, sea, oh sea."

Parts of the shore are strewn thick with rounded pebbles. When dry most of them lose colour, but the wash of the rising tide brings out a variety of shades—green, red, terra-cotta, blue, and black. One we have found glistens with the sheen of mother-of-pearl. Those who know how to look for them might get rarer and more valuable agates; they are sometimes found by the cliffs farther north. But now it is the years that speak through them, as they lie, heaped up by the waves, relics of a measureless past.

Walking grows difficult enough over large, weed-grown, slippery stones, and along rocky ledges, quite as slippery, that are covered at full tide. Beneath the highest point of the headland advance is effectually stopped by a cliff that rises sheer from the sea. Rock-pigeons dash out from a large cave at the sound of our footsteps. From within the rounded opening focuses part of the sea and heightens the ever-changing colour of its waters, making a pleasant picture to look upon.

Last tide has left deep pools and rounded basins full of water in the sandstone rock. It is difficult to gauge their depth unless by the long wavy sea-weed; some of them must be quite six feet. Shoals of small fish swim in them, and a crab or two goes crawling over the depths below. Limpets cling to the damp rock, and on these acorn barnacles cluster thickly. Gaudier anemones show through the water, and produce brighter effects.

A dry shelf of rock, high above the rising tide, makes a nice resting-place. Sunshine and shadow follow one another in close succession on the face of the deep. At one time the eye looks over bands of colour, to the far horizon, in varying shades of brown and grey; at another a shaft of light falls on one part, hiding everything but its own brightness, and round it the waves are a deeper blue. Evanescent tints of green and blue pass over the waters, and disappear as soon as they are seen under the ever-changing influence of light and shade.

Though calm on the rocks, outside the shelter of the headland there is a fresh breeze. A small yacht, with boat in tow, has tried hard to round the point. She is well handled, and tacks gracefully over the water; but wind and tide are too strong for her. Again she tries, breasting the big waves that toss her so rudely. Once more she is beaten back, and at last the little yacht fairly gives up the struggle and seeks the smoother water she has left. The two hands that man her will be very late in reaching home to-night.

Far out, passing sea-birds follow the line of the coast. Gulls fly with an easy, graceful motion, and, at this distance, appear to touch the waves as with paddles at each sweep of their long wings. Guillemots and puffins hurry along, using their shorter pinions more rapidly, and progress at a great rate. Waders—mostly redshanks, from their call—pass in

swift, dashing flight. Beyond gunshot, a few eider-duck are rising and falling on the waves.

The returning tide makes an idle, restful sound. As on a many-keyed instrument, the never-resting waters beat out sea melodies on the shore. Different notes fall on the ear as the wave swishes over the pebbles, or plunges into hollow and cranny, or laps softly on the opener surface of the rock. But the grander notes that come with the storm are silent; there is none of the loud thunder, the heavy crash and deafening roll of the great deep.

Close to the rock the watery tints are beautiful, sea-greens and blues shot through with deeper shades from dark rounded stones and long-stemmed waving weeds. A sense of marvel and vagueness is left on the mind as it tries in vain to pierce the depths where vision fails. Baffled here, the thoughts go over the gleaming surface of the wide sea to the far horizon, only to return, like the old dove, without finding a resting-place. The glamour of the watery depths draws the mind to its fruitless task, as the moth is drawn to the light. This human desire to probe the secret of the unknown, the heart of mystery, is part of life's untiring struggle to understand itself.

But all at once a rounded head has risen from the water near the shore, between a salmon-net and a promontory of rock, then slowly disappears again. It is the first part in one of nature's tragedies; all unsought, we are to be witnesses of a scene that we

might have looked for long years in vain. Quick as thought the head rises a second time—a full-grown grey seal's—with a large fish, held by the middle of the body, wriggling in the powerful mouth. The silvery prey is dropped, and lifted free of the water again, quivering and struggling until a savage bite has deprived it of life. Now the fierce sea creature is rending the skin off, and tearing the salmon in pieces. So close are we that we can hear the sound it makes. Time after time the seal sinks out of sight, to reappear immediately with another red morsel of the hapless fish. The last large portion is swallowed with difficulty; the motion of the jaws can be seen working it down the narrow throat. In a very short time it is all over—such an experience of bloodthirsty ravin as we have never had before. As soon as he has finished his feast, the seal sees us, and, diving rapidly, makes for the open sea. Well for the fisherman's peace of mind that he did not come with us: such a huge brute will seriously spoil the prospects of the season's catch.

It is time we were home; the gathering cloud-mist threatens another fall of rain. But once fairly started, we shall soon get there; though eight miles inland, it lies much lower than the summit of the headland, and the inclines are with us most of the way.

SUMMER FULNESS.

POLLEN rises in little clouds as the foot brushes the grasses that hang over the path. Within a short space we have passed many kinds of them, lingering to pull one here and there and bunch them together—cocksfoot, sweet vernal, meadow fescue, quake grass, and many more. They mark the ripeness of summer, the fulness of another year. At sight of them a half-sad strain enters the thoughts, as a shred of vapour crosses the sun. More than anything in nature, the ripening grasses proclaim that the year has almost reached its highest meridian.

But every other feeling soon passes into one of happy abandonment to the joy and fulness of summer. Thought gives way to pure feeling as the present with its life fills the heart. The profusion and wild luxuriance of nature enlarge the whole being, both mind and spirit. Every available space along the road appears to be occupied with living things. Dog-roses at their best gem the hedge; the hedge itself, untrimmed for years, shoots up long sprays of vivid green; the ground

to the edge of the beaten track is a sloping bank of tall plants, flowers, and grasses. Over all the dense leafage of the trees spreads itself against the blue above them. Though life is encroaching everywhere on the opener space, it fills the heart in the same full measure, so that the result is an enlarged feeling—one of fulness and freedom, rather than one of confinement.

This wild luxuriance of summer, filling everything, lasts for a week or two at most—from the beginning of the month to mid-July. Already the mower has begun his work in the hay-field. Over the sweating horses barn-swallows glide in the hot sunshine, following them round and round for the rich feast of insects that rise from the falling grass. Breeze-flies torment the poor beasts as they toil round the field; where there are wood and sheltering hedges, these often become an unendurable pest. Without the solution of carbolic with which the farmer has them rubbed, the toiling horses would be driven to distraction. Apart from flies and broiling heat, haying is one of the pleasantest times of the year.

The volume of bird melody has greatly diminished, for the thrush and the blackbird are almost silent. Larks sing spasmodically; so do the greenfinch, willow-wren, whitethroat, reed-bunting, and those perennial singers, the corn-bunting, redbreast, common wren, and hedge-sparrow. But as the song of birds diminishes, the hum of insect life grows daily stronger. In the wood it passes through every

note, from the shrillest treble that hardly disturbs the silence to the deep-toned drone of larger insects. It is a pleasing sound; but mosquitoes and midges make it difficult to remain any time among the fir-trees. So long as you walk they are not so troublesome; but a rest on the soft, inviting moss is impossible, for at once they gather from all around. Though at the time the bites are hardly perceptible, next day they have become badly inflamed, and very painful. Mosquitoes are worst of all in the fir wood, and, once and again, we have been driven by them from the pleasant shade. In one cottage close to the moor the inmates often suffer from them, and at night their pinging note is as disturbing as in hotter countries.

Outside the wood, in the benty grass that covers the roadside bank, the shrilling grasshopper delights the ear as much now as in the time of the ancients. Vetches have reached their best: tufted ones climb the hedges to hang them with gay blue tassels, and there are large splashes of dull purple and bright yellow on the slope of the field ditch from bush vetch, meadow vetchling, and large trefoil. Along the roadside, and the railway as well, are endless masses of trailing vetch. I find myself standing to look at them every time that I pass, and feel stronger and better for it: everywhere they come as a fresh wonder and a never-failing source of delight. The eye is never tired of gazing at them, because they suggest and express, in their measure,

that divine beauty which the heart feels but can never exhaust.

I cannot tell you how the beauty of the vetches affected me under the blue sky and the glowing radiance of the July sun. Words are but symbols; they are meant to be the key to your own thought, and nothing more. All that we get out of a book we must have brought first to it ourselves. It is as we bring our own thought and our own experience, in the measure that we read ourselves into it, that we can understand any writing at all. "Knowledge is reminiscence," the old sage said, and in nothing is it more realised than in the interpretation of words. So I cannot tell you how the wonderful beauty of the summer vetches affected me to the verge of open emotion, unless my words recall something similar out of your own thoughts or send you to the fields to see it for yourself.

Bees are gathering honey from the white clover of the pasture grass. They are deeply absorbed in their labours—a living symbol of steady concentration and diligence. Nothing seems to distract them from their purpose. From head to head they fly, gathering the liquid sweetness, then up into the sunny air, straight to their distant home. From early morn till sunset busy toilers are coming and others departing, working against time as if a long summer day were too short for all they had to do.

The clover-flower makes a beautifully clear honey. Bean-flower gives a flavour of its own, delicious,

but too sweet for many palates. Woodland trees—sycamore and lime-tree especially — afford the bee another supply of honey. Sycamore blossom is over at latest by the middle of June, but that of the lime serves as an interlude between the larger summer and autumn stores.

Every lime-tree becomes then a busy hive of workers. Through the thick foliage, with its light-coloured flower drooping from every spray, it is difficult to see them, but the hum of many bees is incessant, and long after sunset belated workers are still busy among the limes.

The sound of the sportsman's gun from the rapidly purpling moors marks another important date in the working calendar of the bee. In a good season the heath-flower, 'gleaming from countless acres of moorland and hill, is one of the chief sources of the year's honey, and bees traverse long distances to seek it. The rich amber colour of heather honey easily distinguishes it from that of the earlier year.

On the wooded moors behind the parish the heath-flower does not contain much honey, the bushes are too tough and old, but year by year a number of hives are sent twenty miles or more to the hills. They are conveyed in lorries by night, and, in good weather, the bees gather large quantities from the heather-clad slopes. Near the house of their temporary caretaker a great many hives dot the hillside with tiny, light-painted houses,

visible a long way off. At the close of the season the bees are carted home again by night, and the result of their toil, in a good year, amply repays all expenses of conveyance and keeping.

A partridge leads her brood from the dusty road through a barred gate into the rising corn. The young birds are very small, for the partridge is a late nester. Partridges and larks dusting themselves in quiet reaches are constantly seen on the summer roads.

Beyond the gate raspberries are ripening between the road and an old loose wall; some are already red and luscious. They are the favourite wild fruit of the country. Children linger to gather them on their way home from school, and stain their faces with the crimson juice. Tinkers camped on the moor feast upon them. The wayfarer, hot and dusty from the shadowless road, refreshes his parched throat, forcing his way through the tall canes with all the abandon of youth.

Quantities of raspberries are gathered in flagons by old and young; their wild, sweet flavour makes them a much-sought preserve for the cottage table. From the neighbouring town numbers of people also come to pluck them, where they are most plentiful among the banks of rubble round the quarry pools. Apart from the gathered fruit, raspberry-time gives them a pleasant outing in the country. Birds share in this feast of wild fruit, so do many winged insects, while creeping creatures crawl slowly

up the stems to suck the luscious juices, and abundance is left when all have been served. A fruity odour rises from the heavily laden bushes as you pass them on the road.

Butterflies are abundant in the summer sunshine, their careless, doubling flight in marked contrast to the straight, rapid path of the bee. A pretty blue rests on the blue head of a scabious in the wiry grass, and, folding its wings, seems to disappear into the flower. Meadow browns are taking short, leisurely flights in the rushes. Among them are two or three of a rarer fritillary. I have caught one of these, handling it carefully just for the pure delight of seeing it close at hand. Its orange-red wings are streaked with dark wavy lines, and dotted with little spots. Along the edges is a lovely design in ornamentation, a natural dado to set off the rest of the wing. The under parts are coloured with silvery greys and dun reds. Released, the butterfly rises fast into the air and disappears among the young firs of the moor.

They are all part of the fulness of summer. Creatures of the sunshine, every motion of their beauteous wings expresses joy—that absorbing joy which nature gives to her children, the joy of freedom and abounding life.

The winding footpath invites us: it is softer and pleasanter than the hard, dusty road. It will take us homeward, part of the way at least, and give more shade from the scorching sunbeams. Always

follow it wherever you can; there is far more variety, more character, about a footpath. It winds and doubles with delightful uncertainty along the field-side, across the moor, skirting the wood, by the edge of an old mossed wall. No one knows the country who does not know its footpaths. They bring the heart into closer touch with the great heart of nature; they are the private entrances to her inner chamber. On the road you are only a stranger, but on the path she makes you at home. Nature herself loves the footpath; the wild flowers crowd up to it; furred creatures hunt fearlessly along it or rustle in the rank grass by its side; woodland birds warble their sweetest songs among the shady coverts where it passes. The air above it is full of the fragrance of summer, the concentrated essences of the life-forces from everything around, the invisible breath of flower, and blade, and leaf.

The footpath suggests restfulness, freedom from haste. You must needs saunter leisurely along, and enjoy the thousand interests that nature has brought to your feet. Here she exercises a lover's wiles to keep you from hurrying, revealing her daintiest graces, and making the steps loiter by the windings and doublings, the bushes that encroach upon the path, the long grasses that fall across it to detain the hasting foot, the soft banks that suggest rest and calm thought. Nature is the great poetess. The deepest thoughts and feelings she expresses in loftiest speech. In every kind of poetry she excels;

the footpath is a pastoral out of the fulness of her happy heart.

But here, at last, the pathway crosses a stream by a stepping-stone to join the beaten track. On the other side, under a cloud shadow, the ripening grasses give the unmown hay-field a faint purple tint. Corn-bunting and yellow-hammer are singing in the open, and their languid notes are the passing echoes of the earlier summer song.

A MILL STREAM.

I.

A MILE or more up the manse stream are two grain mills. With the wooded hollows around them they give the whole locality its name. You can reach them by one side of the railway, returning along the other. On the farther side is the main thoroughfare, leading westward to the county town. Where it skirts the oak wood, a side road leaves it to cross the railway near the mills and join Home Farm Road. In summer this is a favourite circular walk.

Another pleasant way of reaching the mills is to take train from our own to the next station, and walk back towards them along the bank of the stream. The station itself is a quiet spot on the shore of a loch through which the stream flows. From the road above you look over a fairly large sheet of water that gets lost at the upper end in a thick growth of grasses, reeds, and other water-plants. Both coots and water-hens on this loch are exceedingly tame: the constant passing of

people has made them quite familiar with man. Fearlessly they swim in the water where it comes close to the road, or walk awkwardly in the short grass. Handsome tufted duck are almost as tame as the coots, but the other kinds keep at a safer distance.

On the opposite side of the road the stream flows through a stretch of marshy ground. It is anything but good walking, but you can follow one bank down by carefully choosing a path through the rushes. At most the risk is only a wet foot, and the walk is more than worth it. Where the ground grows firmer again, the waters of the stream divide to form two mill-races, one for each mill. From this point there is a choice of two paths. The lower one has its own attractions, though it is difficult at places to force a way through the bushes that have overgrown the narrow ground between the streams. On the bank of one mill-race are sweet-violets that have come from some gardens, found root, and flourished here. But choose the path that climbs the slope, for it leads past one of our most interesting places—a little graveyard in the fields. From the name of a neighbouring farm —Chapeltown—there must have been an ancient chapel somewhere near. Every vestige of it, however, has long since vanished. Save for its position, the graveyard has no connection with parish or church. The names on the present tombstones point to its having been once used as the burying-

ground of one old family. A few others, unconnected with them, have been admitted more recently into it; but only at long intervals is an interment now made. The last body was borne to it through part of the growing grain. A small company followed the mortal remains of a good master and a kind friend—a country gentleman of the old school. Retiring in his lifetime, a student and dreamer rather than a man of the world, the lonely spot was the place of his special choice. At his own expressed desire, his body was conveyed in the parish hearse—a relic itself of ancient times—drawn by a white horse that had been a faithful servant for many years. Without pomp or ostentation the scene to those who witnessed it was unspeakably impressive. The humanity of it all was like a last appealing cry out of the depths of life.

A high stone wall surrounds the graveyard. The gate is kept locked, but near one corner, by the help of cavities where stones have fallen out of the masonry, it is always possible to enter, if you do not have the key.

Inside long untended grass covers the almost hidden graves. A few old laburnums hang their drooping branches over them. Rugged sycamore-trees—time's hoary sentinels—shadow them, reaching over great limbs from the field. In the centre is a space with an iron railing enclosing three large tombstones. Near it the other stones have been placed in lines. Later hands have evidently changed their

position, to preserve the memory longer rather than to point the exact resting-place of the dead. Many of these stones have quaint epitaphs engraved on them, and constant morals such as "Memento mori," "Sic transit gloria mundi." One of the dead, a good and highly esteemed man in his day, is described in the lengthy and high-sounding style of more than a century ago as—

> "An affectionate husband,
> A loving parent,
> An easy landlord,
> The poor man's friend,
> Never intended nor designed to harm or
> injure any person."

Another has been commemorated as "a devout worshipper of his Creator, and sincere lover of all mankind." One cut off in the bloom of her youth "was a beautiful, virtuous, and religious young lady." Among the others stands a stone sacred to a mother's memory. The date of her marriage is given, and immediately after the names of her children, with the quaint and unusual statement that they are "all alive" at the time of her death. But there is really very little original in the epitaphs; what marks them more than anything is their old-world simplicity.

On this tree-stump, beside the stones, we must rest for a little before leaving the peaceful graveyard. The thick sycamore foliage is casting shadows over the grass. A tortoiseshell butterfly flits rapidly

across the wall and alights on a dandelion flower. Apart from the smaller insects in the air, it appears to be the only living creature near. The lovely colours of its spread wings—black and crimson and blue—glisten in the bright light. They might be miniature leaves of an ancient, richly illuminated missal. A moment to admire them, and then the butterfly is away again, hurrying over the fields.

Outside, the mill-stream at the wooden hatch sings a never-ending requiem to the sleeping dead. The wind that rushes down the valley wails and moans in the trees above them. The trains rush past with noisy speed. But here, within the lichen-clad walls, are the stillness and peacefulness of the tomb, deeper for the sounds that break upon it from the world without. These afford relief to the heart oppressed by the silence, as the loud tick of the clock or the broken sob of a disconsolate weeper in the shadowed chamber of death.

The graves are untended; there are no fresh-laid wreaths upon them. The garden flowers—snow-drops, crocuses, and roses—that were once planted about them have long since died out. Human love seems to have quite forgotten them; most of them belong to a fast-vanishing race. But nature has taken the place of friendly hearts; she keeps them in loving memory still. In spring she covers their graves with daisy and celandine; after the March storms countless flower-buds open as suddenly as if angels had come and planted them by night.

The laburnums are dying; their trunks and branches have an unhealthy brown hue. The wall has begun to moulder fast in sympathy with the mouldering dust it encloses. By-and-by wall and tree will pass away, and the place of the sleepers be forgotten. The unconscious footsteps of the living will tread on the dust of the dead. Yet ere it passes the solitary graveyard breathes a message to the listening heart—breathes a message from its very decay. From crumbling wall, and old mossed stone, and grass-grown grave its touching accents come. All the earth is consecrated ground. All the earth is God's acre, a great mound of the dead. The fields around are sown thick with them, though the stones have fallen and the trees are gone.

Let them sleep their last long sleep, the great unknown, the multitude that no man can number. Let them sleep, man of the river drift and ancient caveman, Pict, Scot, and merciless raider from the sea, down to the last pained and weary mortal that was gathered to his fathers. Let them sleep soundly, pillowing their heads on their earthy pillows. There were all kinds of them, but let us remember now, in the spirit of the kindly epitaphs about us,—that it may teach us more charity to the living,—the old saying, "De mortuis nil nisi bonum." Who are we that we should sit in judgment? This is God's judgment-place and not man's. Nature herself respects the sacred silence of the tomb; she leaves the very worst of them unjudged. The same shine

and shower fall upon them without distinction. The fragrance-laden wind from the hay-field blows across every grave. The wild flowers scatter their bright petals over one part as well as another. From the thicket by the mill-stream the blackbird comes to sing for good and bad his sweetest vesper-song in the rugged trees.

The sun is hasting to the west. Close the large wooden gate reverently and lock it quietly. The living must live. But before we forget the dead, in all the life and beauty of the evening sunshine, in the pleasant note of the bird and the sweet sound of happy voices, the old question, the question born of sorrow, of bereavement and long waiting, rises again in the heart, "When will it be morning in the tomb?"

II.

Below the old graveyard the mill streams part by a field-breadth to reach their different mills. The footpath passes into the open and follows the one on the right, brushing the willows with which its banks have been planted. Their long osiers are pliant but firm, and will soon be cut for basket-making. A market-garden extends alongside the path on the other side, and the owner's cottage, with door and window half-hidden among woodbine and roses, stands farther down. Beyond it again the

footway crosses the stream to climb the steep slope and end at one of the mills.

Close to the wooden bridge—a plank or two resting on the banks—you may notice the eel-ark. It is nothing more than a large box made of flagstones, sunk into the ground and used for catching eels. We are too early yet for a catch, but later in the season, when numbers of them are coming down the mill stream, for the nature-lover it is full of interest. Then I never miss an opportunity of visiting it with the genial miller.

Once we found a good large catch in the ark. What a sight of squirming eels appeared as soon as he lifted the flagstone that formed the lid. There must have been three or four inches of them in depth, of different sizes and different shades of colour—some dark with dingy green and yellowish tints, others lighter and more silvery along their sides. Three large eels kept pushing their way to the surface through the tangled mass, forming sea-serpent-like folds, and then disappearing again. The miller said each of these would weigh from four to five pounds, and that he had got much larger ones. One monster eel, caught some years ago, was fully ten pounds in weight. He tried to catch the largest of the three that we might see it to better advantage. It was anything but an easy matter, the eel was so strong and slippery. Again and again bending on his knees, he clutched at it as it came to the lower end of the ark, but it con-

tinually broke away from his hold and disappeared among the smaller eels. At last, with a piece of rag to give a rougher holding surface, he got it below the head and lifted it up, wriggling and doubling about his hand. But it was not a pleasant sight, with its thick, twining, dark body and its black eyes forced half out of their sockets with the pressure. The miller found the wriggling eel very difficult to hold, and it was soon returned to its fellows.

The plan of the eel-ark is simple enough. A few feet below it an iron hatch with upright bars too narrow for an eel to pass between fills the stream. In line with the ark itself, and communicating with it from the water, is a stone pipe large enough to admit the largest eel. Bending down, you can see this stone passage at its upper end, and on a level with the top of the ark. At the nearer end is a narrow iron hatch—"hake" the miller calls it—to give an outlet again for the entering water.

The eels follow the course of the stream from the lochs above, under pressure of that instinct which makes the salmon, about the same time, ascend our rivers and smaller streams. But the two migrations are reversed in direction: for the eels, the lochs take the place of the sea. They are seeking the real sea, however, for purposes of reproduction somewhere in the outer depths. In spite of the multitudes caught every season at both mills, large numbers must get down the streams. Earlier in the season

tiny ones may be seen making their way upwards again.

Descending the mill stream, the eels are stopped by the hatch. They search for an opening through it from side to side, then backwards along the banks of the stream. Some of them come at last to the stone outlet, and passing through it one by one, fall into the ark. One is often followed by a few more, as if they came in small shoals.

According to the year, eels begin to descend as early as the last week of July, and continue descending as late as December. The best months are the later autumn ones, when the leaves drift down the stream. They come most abundantly after dark, usually from eight to midnight. Nights that are darkest they love best, and a slightly swollen condition of the water. With muddy water they come sometimes on clearer nights, but bright moonlight is almost always a barren time. On a good night the lantern of the miller can be seen moving in the darkness so long as the eels descend. The drifting leaves tend to choke the hatch, and if they were not removed the rising water flowing over the top would allow most of the eels to escape. So with a short rake he goes to it at intervals all through the night, and drags up the leaves to keep it open.

Some seasons are much better than others: on a successful night of a good season as many as two hundredweights have been got. The miller remembers one particular August night during his

earlier tenancy when almost half a ton of eels entered the ark; but this was far and away his record catch. A heavy thunderstorm took place the day before. The differently tinted eels, he thinks, come from different lochs,—those that are very dark in colour from the lower and deeper loch, and the beautiful silvery eels from the upper one, where the water is clearer and the bottom more shingly. With the eels large trout occasionally come, and some of them are caught near the hatch. One summer a shoal of good-sized perch appeared in both mill streams, and were got in great quantities by the mills.

When the miller has sufficient eels in the ark he puts them alive into boxes, to be sent by train to the London market. The larger are not so valuable as the same weight of smaller ones; they have to be cut into parts, according to purchase, and what remain on the fish-merchant's hands soon grow stale. The smaller ones, too, are more delicately flavoured.

A successful eel season is a consideration to the miller, as it makes a marked difference to his income when prices are good. But many seasons yield him a very poor return, the weight of fish for the whole of one of them being hardly more than that of the famous August night.

A ludicrous incident happened in the transmission of one boxful of eels by rail. The lid boards had been rather insecurely fastened; but without mishap the box got to a near junction, where it was trans-

ferred from the slower train to the platform to wait the fast fish train. In the interval one or two adventurous eels prised up a board by sheer force of eel muscle and made their escape. Presently more followed them, wriggling like snakes over the platform and down upon the permanent way, a source of hasty and exciting work for the officials to get them safely secured before train time.

Some years since a severe frost killed the eels in a small loch of the neighbourhood where they were very plentiful. The following spring numbers were found dead by the water-edge. Here the perch continued almost as numerous as before. But strangely enough, in another loch the result of the intensely severe weather of the same winter produced an exactly opposite effect, for while both perch and pike were almost exterminated, eels again were very little affected. One of these lochs was comparatively shallow, the other exceedingly deep.

The distant demand has not produced the local eel industry; on the contrary, before the days of railway transport there were more arks for their capture than there are now. Every favourable spot by the stream had its eel-ark, and the position of old ones that have passed away can still be pointed out. There has always been a prejudice among Scotch people against eels as food, but other uses were found for them. Their skins made tough and pliable thongs, that were frequently used for binding together the two parts of the flail with which

the countryman threshed out his grain. From their fat boiled down an oil was got that made a clear flame in the old cruisie-lamps.

Like the proverbial dog with a bad name, the eel has very few friends. The fisherman regards it with aversion for swallowing his hook and knotting his line. During a flood, when it takes ground-bait greedily, the mutilated body is often left along the banks of the stream. Its very appearance—slimy, snake-like—and its wonderful powers of vitality are popular arguments against the eel. It is regarded with a superstitious dread, because these powers enable it to appear often in unexpected places. The mystery that surrounds the reproduction of the eel is another source of superstition. You meet with intelligent people still who find it difficult to give up entirely the theory that horse-hairs in running water may turn into eels. There is a strange local fancy that one of the beetles is the mother of them. I have heard the appearance of the beetle and other details given with all the semblance of scientific truth. These things have helped to create a general prejudice against the poor eel. The miller himself, though he owes so much to it, has not altogether escaped the superstitious influences about him. Thinking, perhaps, of weary vigils by the hatch when nights grow long and chill, he calls the eel "the evil creature that loves the darkness."

A SUMMER STORM.

BIRD and beast have suffered severely from the excessive heat. Under the shade of the trees, thrushes lay in the grass with gaping bill and outstretched wing. The cattle were in a pitiable case from tormenting flies: goaded to desperation, they could not feed, but rushed all over the field with uplifted tails. For many days the sun showered down rays from brazen skies—a scorching, blistering shower. All the summer freshness had left the leaves; those of the sycamore became shrivelled and blotched with large dark spots. The grass by the hard glaring roads was parched and dusty. A deep stillness fell on nature with this stifling heat; among the fields the only sound that broke it was the churring note of grasshoppers. The sun furnace affected man as well as beast. His bodily and mental energies were paralysed by it; in the heat of the day physical toil became a burden, and the springs of thought dried up.

Day after day large clouds appeared above the horizon, only to break and disappear again as soon as they rose higher into the heavens. The farmers

said the earth was too dry—there was no attraction to bring down the rain. But to-day dark clouds mounted into the quivering sky. Thunder muttered and growled in the distance. All the west grew inky black, and small white shreds of vapour drifted across this dark background of cloud. The blackness advanced rapidly up the sky. A slight wind suddenly rose and blew from the east, but soon changed. The air felt more and more oppressive. There was a deep, tense stillness that made the chirping of the sparrows sound very loud. The thunder-peals increased in violence as the lightning broke more vividly from the cloud. Flash after flash dazzled the eye with abrupt, forked discharges and bright sheets of flame. One broke across the cloudy darkness, dividing into three branches like a river entering the sea.

It was interesting to study the ways of the wild creatures amid the growing elemental strife. There is a good deal of popular misconception as to the effect of a thunderstorm upon them: man attributes his own sensations and feelings to the lower creatures. But they showed little trace of awe and dread; on the contrary, the storm woke them to new activity and life. The noise of the thunder-peals made a pheasant crow several times from the shrubbery. Sparrows continued their incessant chirping. Lapwings floated across the sky, their white breasts gleaming against the darkest cloud. A ring-dove flew from some elms in the field, clapping its wings and rising

and falling in arcs of flight. In a tree quite near a blackbird sang low but sweetly. Others were searching for food in the soil: probably worms, that had gone deep down during the drought, were coming to the surface again. Cattle pastured peacefully near the stream, to all appearance glad that the sun was overcast at last. The loud noise and the blinding glare do, no doubt, alarm the lower creatures, most of all those that have been domesticated, but this alarm is not so general as we regard it, and only within narrow limits do they possess the sense of danger that underlies the feeling of awe in man.

Louder and louder pealed the wild noise of cloud artillery, until overhead it broke into one long, loud rattle of heavy guns. The darkness passed to gather again. Huge cloud piles rushed up the steeps of heaven to the undecided strife, each one big with infinite possibilities. Storms lay hid in them as passions in a human breast. Before they crashed together in renewed battle, part of the blue sky beyond them was for a short time visible. They gathered themselves round this opening, great cliffs of vapour frowning over a rapidly lessening space of azure sea. The eye looked up into their depths, where sunlit promontory and shadowy cave were massed together. Suddenly a roll of vapour like cannon-smoke advanced from the upper edge of one cloud. The blue was blotted out, and once more pealed the heavy roll of the thunder. The cloud columns were mingled again in the rude *mêlée*

of fearful battle. As drops of blood pouring from stricken bodies, hail and rain fell in torrents, dancing on the garden-path and rushing in foamy streams down the slope among the bushes. Then the clouds parted, growling and roaring like wild beasts.

Nor even yet was the vapoury battle over. The atmosphere, cooled by the heavy shower, grew sultry again towards evening. About ten the thunder rolled with renewed loudness, and the lightning flashed against the window. All the countryside was lit up; the beeches by the old manse leapt into sudden vision, and then, as if some stunning blow had bereft the mind of consciousness, disappeared as suddenly into the murky darkness. On the doorstep a line of small print was easily visible; often the lightning appeared to linger and play upon the white pages of the book. Flash followed flash with dread rapidity; in the excess of brightness that filled the night the eye could not localise their position in the sky. There was no appreciable interval between light and reflection, so that both were lost in one widespread glow. Flashes came from different points of the sky at the same time: often there were three together. All this confused the power of exact vision, — just once or twice was the forked centre of discharge definitely seen. Some flashes were of a clear dazzling whiteness, while others showed rose, bluish, and faint yellow tints.

Of all the awe-inspiring scenes of nature, there is

none that, for terrific sublimity, surpasses a thunder-storm at night. The sudden bursting of the vivid light from the thick darkness, the contrast between it and the intenser blackness that follows, the feeling of uncertainty in the mind as to where the next loud crash, with its blinding glare, may come from, the unknown potencies of destruction in the storm, all impress the heart. At last we were fairly driven indoors, where the light of a strong lamp looked pale and feeble after the excessive brightness of the lightning-flashes. The window-sashes rattled with the loud noise of the severer peals, but gradually the thunder passed, moaning in the distance, and died away at length to the east with the noise of a distant gale.

THE TURN OF THE YEAR.

THE leaves have hardly begun to colour yet, but this forenoon, passing through the fields, something suddenly suggested the end of the year. It is hard to explain how the thought arose or what constituted it: the sun has been shining brightly in a blue cirrus-streaked sky, the wild flowers are at their best along roadside and stream, and the grain-fields are not nearly ready for the reaper's whirring sound. But there it was, a feeling rather than a thought, passing over the heart like a shiver, as haunting as a presentiment of evil. Year by year it comes in the same way, as in life when one suddenly realises that age is at hand. From that moment the year is consciously on the turn. It has reached its meridian height and begun to descend the other side. There were really traces of the change before in the few yellow elm leaves that showed to an eye looking up through the branches, in brown-spotted sycamore leaf, on the whitening grasses by the path; but the intense vitality that kept the wheels of the year revolving prevented the heart from realising it.

Now you feel it, and ever after the forces of decay begin more sensibly to overpower those of active life.

Night is rapidly encroaching on the long summer day. The moisture from the heavy dew-fall clings longer to the rank grass. In the morning air there is a delicious freshness. Larks have begun to twitter again above the fields in a horizontal flight; a little later a bird here and there will rise high as in spring-time in fuller song. Large flights of rooks make some of the meadows dark with their numbers; many of them are immigrants that have come some time before the first redwing, and long lines may be seen flying from the sea. Vaster still are the flights of lapwings that wheel in the air with alternate gleams of white and black; the numbers that frequent two or three fields cannot be less than ten thousand birds. Starlings are in numbers almost as vast, but they spread over the country to feed as the day advances.

The air feels fresh and invigorating. Through the crystalline lens of morning, dew-washed, each object shows out bold and clear. This clearness of vision has the same effect as a magnifying-glass, bringing everything nearer, so that the landscape appears very much contracted. Nature suggests many thoughts and appears under many forms. Now, when not a breath of wind stirs, it is the picturesque side of her that appeals to the mind. That is the aspect under which she reveals herself in her calm and clear-cut

lines, as a noble picture painted by the great Artist Himself.

But on other mornings the atmospheric conditions are quite different. A haze lies lightly on all the country about, and the dimness and indefiniteness with which objects are seen through it exaggerate distance as much as the clear air contracted it. Vision travels slowly over field, wood, and distant hill-slope as though it were clogged, and to the horizon it seems a very long way. But as the sun rises into the heavens the mist will lift and give promise of a glorious day.

Ring-doves coo from the wood: their pleading note comes closer to the house, and is more frequently heard. In the grass by a field of corn a pair of hares chase one another; but very little game is visible. Partridges and hares are almost all in the standing corn, and seldom leave it. No cover could protect them better,—it is so thick and bewildering that even a dog gets quite lost in a large grain-field. Occasionally the gamekeeper must wait for some time when his favourite retriever has followed a wounded hare into it, shouting to give him some idea of direction and to encourage him. The howling of the poor animal shows his utter perplexity, and at times he will stand still, whining miserably, as if he were hopelessly lost. A late harvest makes a late sporting season: no bag of any size will be got until the standing crop has been cut. The rabbit, too, lives a great deal among the grain, and

large numbers are killed by men and boys as they rush from the last rapidly diminishing patch of uncut corn in the centre of the field.

Different grain crops as they ripen have their own distinctive tints. Wheat-fields show ruddy bronze in the sunshine, oats lighter, and barley-fields lighter still, but the effect varies a good deal according to the day. The meadows have lost their earlier freshness as the result of the heat and the seeding grasses. But the turnip-fields, with their spread of fresh green leaf, take the place of the more vivid greens that have passed away; so does the aftermath of clover in the hay-field, and a brighter note of colour is produced by acres of potatoes that are richly purpled with abundant blossom. One must see it over large fields in gleaming breadths of purple and white to be able to realise how beautiful potato blossom can be.

Some time earlier a lull has come in the song of birds. Among the fields one or two voices are all that are left from the full-throated chorus of summer. These are mostly yellow-hammer and corn-bunting: both birds sing late into August and then suddenly cease, but now there appears little melody in their song. Almost every field from fence and wall has one or other of them singing. The yellow-hammer loves to sing in alternate strain to another of its kind. In places that they frequent several birds sing within hearing, one after another, until the monotonous melancholy of the sound gets wellnigh

unendurable. One song does yet retain all the sweetness and melody of summer, the fluty trill of the brown linnet, and the ear always hears it with delight.

Near the house greenfinches breeze all day from tree and shrubbery. Redbreast and wren take the place here of the two bird minstrels of the fields; but the redbreast's song gets more full as autumn advances, until there are almost as many birds singing about the houses as there were thrushes in springtime.

The swallows have grown restless, though it will be two months still before the last of them depart. Under the cottage eaves house-martins have a second brood, and in the air above old and young birds meet for a brief interval in process of feeding. But the swifts have disappeared, and large gatherings of the other birds show that they are preparing to follow them. Flock after flock have already begun their southward flight. For a day or more hundreds of them fly in the sunny air, or gather on the houses, then disappear with the first favourable wind that brings another flight to fill their places. The ordinary eye seldom marks this arrival and departure of swallows; but a more diligent observer may notice one day a large gathering of barn-swallows, the next, perhaps, of house-martins. Both of these often alight now on some tall tree that seems to attract them; the house-martin seldom if ever does it at other seasons. One day martins were flying thick as bees

about a hive round the large manse aspen, and alighting constantly among its broad, trembling leaves.

Many plants have but just begun to come into flower. Numerous hawkweeds, and the greater bird's-foot trefoil, last of the vetch kind, are taking the place of the buttercups on the roadside bank. Blue, with its allied shades of pink, rose, and purple, contend with yellow as the predominant hue of these later wild flowers. There appears to be more of this blue range of colouring than at any season of the year, for we do not have such multitudes of wild hyacinths as in some places carpet the spring woods with a blue haze of colour. Blue often changes into the other tints akin to it. The hyacinth or blue-bell has pink, rose, and white varieties; so has the little milkwort on the June moors, and those later blue flowers, self-heal, devil's-bit scabious, and hairbell.

Some of the pink-flowered marsh thistles among the rushes of the stream field, as varied in their colouring, are shrub-like in their proportions: a few of them measure quite six feet in height, and have long lateral branches rising from the large central stem. Cabbage butterflies drift from point to point over the rushes, in the distance, like blown scraps of paper, so little of purpose does there appear in their flight, and meadow browns rise from the depths of the grass. Everywhere is abundant butterfly life. Tortoiseshells flit rapidly along the road, or show out beautifully against the rich yellow of dandelion

flowers; red admirals pass in the air, and a rarer painted lady difficult of approach. It is above all the season of insect life that fills the air with pleasant sounds. Along the stream, wherever a clump of trees grow, above the opener country, an ever-changing note falls on the ear, from the shrill of the grasshopper or the deep drone of the humble-bee to the higher note of unseen insects overhead. In the wood it is everywhere, rising and falling, in different keys, through different octaves, yet all blending harmoniously, an insect Æolian harp whispering its tender love-thoughts to the wandering breeze. The turn of the year is the springtime of insects, and with its sunny days the brief life of insect swarms begins and ends.

Now, too, the many coloured funguses rise from the ground in a night. Among the fir-trees bright crimson ones shine out of the shadow with the vivid colour of flower-cups. Under the opener birches of the moor, among the earliest fallen leaves, they are even more abundant, of every size, of every gradation of colouring,—brown, grey, slate colour, pale buff, orange, and purple,—all within a short space. On the confines of existence, where life and death touch one another, the very life of decay itself, as if nature struggled to leave nothing unrealised of all her resources, the mind comes to the humble fungus with a feeling of reverence and mystery. It is one of the strangest of nature's many creative fancies, a sportive thought from her infinite-sided mind.

Belated tracts of great heat come long after the sun has begun to turn again in his course. The hottest days of all the season often fall in August. This year the heat culminated in the last two days of the month and the first day of September. These set all the daily papers searching for precedents. The thermometer, for so late a season, leapt up to record heights. All over the country the heat burned by day and stifled by night. In London, even in the shade, on three successive days, the mercury ranged from 91 to almost 94 degrees. The manœuvres of the French army at Paris were interrupted and deferred on account of the terrible heat, which reached there 100 degrees in the shade. Nearer home the work of the fields became almost impossible beneath a burning sun that was never tempered, from morning to night, by the smallest cloud. Many cases of sunstroke took place in different parts; people were found unconscious by the wayside; several died from its effects.

Though rarely so intense, there is no season without these later periods of heat. They are spasmodic efforts that do not deceive; too clearly does the lengthening night proclaim that the year is fast on the turn.

AUTUMN LEAVES.

RED admiral butterflies visit the garden on sunny autumn days. The eye never tires of looking at them as they rest for a moment to gather the sweets of a flower. To-day one of the last of them has come. Broad-winged, gorgeous in its crimson, white, and bright-blue colouring, it opens and closes its wings on a French marigold flower. Ethereal in its beauty, the bright-hued insect suggests far more than is expressed. But it is a creature of the sunshine: when the shadow falls upon it, the butterfly rises and flies rapidly away.

A redbreast is singing in one of the trees. Another answers him from a lime-tree, and soon afterwards three are singing, sometimes together, sometimes one after another, in sweet refrain. A strange sadness has crept into the redbreast's notes; all the vivacity and promise of spring have gone out of them. How hard it is to realise that the feeling is not in the bird's song, but in the listening heart! We look at nature through the mood of the passing moment, and all unconsciously she returns, in her silent sympathy, the echoes of our own passions and

thoughts. Her spirit reflects the human spirit, and from the pages of her mystical book repeats the story of human life.

In the quiet garden the heart feels all the pensiveness of autumn. There is something in the dreamy light of the languid sunshine, in the exquisite tints of the lingering flowers, in the hectic colours of the fading leaves, that produces thoughts thrilling with tenderness. Nature's beauties have culminated in the great transformation-scene of the year. Life has reached its ideal, the heart can imagine nothing more beautiful, and this satiety of delight seems equally balanced between sorrow and joy.

The sun is shining strong and bright for an October afternoon. A dazzling glare makes it difficult to look at the white page: the only way to do it with any comfort is to lift up the book a little and read in the shadowed light. The whole space within the yew hedge and the garden walls is flooded with soft orange sunshine. Objects seen through it have a strangely unreal appearance. The rays of the autumn sun seem to transfigure and give a weird beauty to everything they touch. The green meadows under them take a deep yellow tint; a newly ploughed field changes from dark brown to delicate rose.

The garden flowers are passing fast. A few autumn anemones still gleam white against the greener leafage; from the wall a draggled blue clematis hangs;

the cornflowers by the side of a walk have a blossom or two left on their topmost stems; several richly tinted roses are all that are left of the gaudy host of summer. The dahlias are dead: a few nights ago a sharp frost killed them in the fulness of their beauty. The stems blackened as the sun rose, and the flowers hung their heads limp and lifeless; the very colours that gave them such beautiful variety have disappeared, and the large blossom has become a dark sodden mass.

The eye turns from them to the bright colouring of the foliage. The gooseberry bushes have a pink tinge along the younger branches; a Virginia creeper has covered part of the wall with large crimson leaves; outside some sycamore-trees have become a medley of green and gold; the beeches that hide the old manse are great masses of colour—yellow and orange, brown and russet. Before the glorious beeches the soul uncovered itself. The heavenly fire burned in them, every branch and tiny twig glowed in the radiant light; the place about them was holy ground. Few if any trees compare with the beech for autumn tints. Some may prefer the delicate carmine of the wild cherry and the mountain-ash, or the bright yellow of the birch and the elm-tree, but all these lack the beautiful variety of the beech.

From the garden woodland reaches to the wooded hill farther away. We are too near to see the wealth of colour on this stretch of wood. The great beeches fill the foreground and leave just enough of the other

trees visible to give fuller effect to their wonderful beauty. But from the road the eye traverses a wide surface of changing foliage. In the mellow hazy sunshine it forms an ideal autumn scene. Along the stream the willows are hoary green—their leaves hardly change before they fall. Behind them some oaks are deep green, but not so deep as a narrow belt of spruce and fir trees near them. Among these more sober tints the vivid colours of the other trees flame out with greater splendour. Some fields are framed in a setting of yellow, russet, and carmine. Near the station, where the road passes through a long tunnel of leaves, it is lit up by the brilliancy of the tints above. One tree in the deeper shadow of the wood appears to be hung with a myriad little fairy-lamps.

The perspective of the country in autumn changes with the changed colouring. The mind is deceived by the unaccustomed lights. In a wood two or three field-breadths away from a familiar footpath the dark edge of firs is broken by a few deciduous trees. To the passers-by these appear to stand out from a dark background. Nature, like a skilful artist, by her colouring has thrown them into strong relief: they are equally far away with the rest of the trees, but somehow they seem much nearer.

The redbreasts have been singing incessantly for the past hour. In the large ash starlings are whistling, one of them mimicking the mellow notes

of the blackbird's song. A great many flocks pass in the late afternoon on their way to roost in the reeds of the lochs: ten have passed within as many minutes. One or two small ones fly low, almost touching the tops of the willows; other flocks are much higher, and from want of anything to mark their rate of motion appear to fly more slowly. Many hundreds passed in one; and the noise of their wings came down like the swish of a strong wind in the woods.

As the shadows lengthen pheasants gather to their roosting coverts among the shrubs and trees about the old manse. They are noisiest then, repeating a *tu-tuking* sound incessantly. Before the last of them have found a comfortable perch it is almost dark, and their restless notes mingle with the hooting of the brown owl and the shrill call of the bat. From the castle avenue on frosty nights you can see pheasants in the trees outlined against the clear sky.

One day lately eight of them came for sanctuary to the shrubs, survivors from the first battue of the season. The beaters drove the grounds to the old manse, and round about it the firing was heaviest. From a window it sounded at times like volleying in some mimic battle; but many of the birds got away, the cover was so thick. The pheasants that came to the manse had been hand-fed, and were very tame. When disturbed by any one coming along the drive, they sought quite

leisurely the cover of the laurels. Two cock birds in full plumage were tamer than the others, dusting themselves by the doorway and pecking with the blackbirds among the fallen leaves in front of the house. They were fond of perching on the yew hedge within near view of the study window, and the more gorgeous peafowl could hardly have looked prettier. The pheasants were less artificial, more in harmony with the scene around them; their colours passed naturally into those of the late flowers in the border beneath them and the yellowing leaves. They did not appear to pose for artistic effect, nor did they give that impression of proud self-consciousness which detracts so much from the beauty of the other bird.

The sun is rapidly descending. Long rays of orange light are shooting through the branches and gilding the leaves with a deeper gold; above the sky is still blue. Eye and ear miss the soft gliding flight and pleasant twitter of the swallow. More than a week since they gathered—martins and barn-swallows—in large flocks on the church roof. Next morning the main flock had gone; the last pair left a few days afterwards—old ones with a belated brood. To-night the sky is bare and empty without them, and more than anything their absence makes the mind realise that winter is at hand.

Lovely tints are appearing in the west. Cirrus and larger clouds have gathered athwart the sun-

set. The colours are those on the autumn leaves, but far more brilliant and intense. Orange succeeds silver, and gives place in turn to crimson and vermilion. Little clouds are bathed in the living radiance; some of them glow like large uncut rubies, as they flash the light from the brow of evening. The sky over the sunset has grown a spacious background for a tracery of heavenly frost work. The upper cirrus clouds change their form from long bars of gold, with exquisite blues and opals between, to beautiful shreds and patches of orange light. Wondrous golden rays rise to the darker clouds overhead. Now the western sky is dashed with foam-spray from an invisible, molten sea. The saffron colours have changed to crimson. Lovelier and lovelier the heavens glow over the departed sun; the radiant tints of the cloudlets are like the sparkle of light through purest wine. The heart can only feel at the spectacle of such marvellous beauty; its very silence is highest adoration.

But fast as all things mortal the rich bloom of evening passes away. The changing colours are being gathered rapidly into the sunset; the crimson has faded through a duller carmine to a fainter rose. A lurid afterglow, with the hues of an old master, lasts for some time longer. At the zenith the clouds have become a chilly white; the evening air is cold and shivery. The redbreast has long since ceased his song, and the blackbird given his last *pink-pink*

among the bushes. In the fields the partridges have finished their vespers, and are snugly cowering in the sheltering furrow. A planet is shining brightly in the southern sky. It is time to close the unread book and resume its interrupted story in the shelter and warmth of the lighted room.

A WET HARVEST.

THE harvest fields are a scene of bustle and activity: every available man and horse are being used to bring to the stackyard the precious grain. Carts rumble along under their bulky loads from dawn till late at night. For the past few days there have been no conventional hours of labour. The workers are as willing as the master, and the master himself is toiling with his workers. The fear of heavy loss has made for the time a closer brotherhood between them all. Under the bright light of a calm, broad harvest moon they are working still, and their shouts may be heard several field-breadths away.

The year has been the wettest for almost half a century. Week after week the shocks lay under a pelting rain that kept the streams in constant flood and made the field-roads impassable. Though the country around is a comparatively early one, some of the grain was still uncut later than the middle of October. In these standing fields were some patches of green, where the corn had never ripened for lack of sunshine; others where the young

ears, beaten down by wind and rain, produced a second growth. For days the reapers lay, in the roads scythe-cut for them, under their canvas coverings: sheaves were piled up against the more exposed parts to keep the driving rain from injuring them.

The uncut fields were really in better condition than those that had been cut so long. It was pitiful to see the dark shocks under the dripping, depressing skies. The straw rapidly began to rot, and, on one side of the shock, the ear sprouted,—many of the young blades were more than two inches long. Such grain was useless for human food, and the cattle would not eat the evil-smelling straw.

To crown the farmer's troubles, a perfect plague of rats infested the fields. They swarmed in the old stone walls and along the ditches. Ferrets sent numbers of them from rabbit-burrows: out of one burrow eight rats bolted, and six were shot. In some cases ferrets were never seen again: they had been over-matched and killed by the swarming rats. Among the sheaves of one field a dog destroyed fourteen within a very short time. Under many of the shocks of a barley-field that margins the stream they had honeycombed the ground, and half-eaten ears of barley were strewn thickly about. The long weeks that the grain lay in shock largely increased their opportunities of destruction. Stacks will be fairly riddled with them, and

farmhouses overrun, soon as cold and hunger have driven the destructive hordes from the fields. But happen what will, clearer, breezier weather has come at last, and it is a joy to hear the laden carts rumbling past to the rapidly filling stackyard.

Another week of wind and sunshine should empty the fields of all their store. For some time after, until the eye is familiarised with the change, they will look as desolate and empty as a house newly stripped of its furniture. The mind realises the contrast as the thoughts go back unconsciously to the time when the grain was rustling in the breeze. Every field seemed full to overflowing; the myriad ears fell over the footpath, and almost hid the open ditches; they pressed against the hedges, threatening to sweep them away in an overwhelming rush of plenty; every inch of ground was occupied with the crowding stems. Earth bent beneath the heavy load of her children's food. The empty fields suggest the past abundance, and the contrast produces a feeling of emptiness and desolation in the heart.

In autumn as in spring the arrival and departure of summer and winter migrants overlap one another. A flock of redwings often linger until the second week of May, and others return early in October. All through the lengthening October nights their shrill, long-drawn "tseep" may be heard as they fly overhead from the sea. With the moonlight nights of the month large numbers arrive all along

the east coast. Until November is almost ended the streaming army comes—redwing and fieldfare together.

Another immigrant—the mountain finch—has newly arrived from the north. Harsh, strange cries are heard from the beech-trees, where these birds find their favourite food. On the ground are many of them pecking among the leaves for fallen mast—pretty, mottled birds like chaffinches, though smaller and more varied in colouring. As they rise into the trees a white spot above the tail, as in the bullfinch, shows conspicuously.

Many of the winter immigrants have come, but some delaying swallows are gliding in the air by the old manse. Yesterday four young barn-swallows perched together on the telegraph wire, and a number of older birds, with a few house-martins, circled above them. There was a restlessness in their movements, a strange aimlessness of flight, that are the surest signs of their early departure. The loving task that brought them in the spring-time is ended; chillier weather has made their insect supplies more precarious, and the little travellers are longing to be away. Swifts lingered much later than usual this year. One or two birds continued near their nesting quarters in a bridge until the first week of September.

Sheep have now begun to come from the hills in large numbers to their winter pasture. They feed in many of the grass fields around, giving a more

peaceful, pastoral appearance to the country. The farmer finds them a very helpful source of revenue in hard times, and so well do the sheep fit into the round of the farm year that they mean little if any corresponding outlay on his part. The pasture is let to the sheep-owner at a season of the year when he cannot make use of it for himself, and as much of his turnip crop as he can spare. Sheep fertilise his fields for the coming year, and the rent, though small, forms an appreciable second harvest. The farmer may sometimes say this winter let is hardly worth the trouble, which is practically none; but the outcry of many farmers if the pasture should be unlet shows how much store is set by it.

The wintering flocks come from the uplands of the county or farther still away. Most of them are black-faced Highland sheep, small but exceedingly hardy, living out in weather that would kill most creatures. One winter a field in the parish was pastured by Iceland sheep. These were more varied in colour, and the way in which great splashes of brown or black mixed with the white parts of the fleece gave some a rather remarkable appearance. From the point of view of the sheep-owner they did not appear a success—at least, they never came to the parish to pasture again. Restlessness was their great fault. Active as deer, and never staying long in one place, no fences were strong or close enough to keep them. "They were a real heartbreak," one shepherd said, in speaking of them.

In spring they are taken away from their lowland pasture before they can damage the young grass, and long flocks of bleating sheep crowd the roads again.

One of the most striking features of an autumn walk is the number of spider-webs that cover every field. They give a character to the last weeks of sunshine as much in their way as the fading leaves. One morning they are seen in myriads, all beaded with dew-drops, where there was no apparent trace of them the day before. Formed in a night like a fabled palace, they are quite as wonderful and beautiful. A testimony, too, to the manifold and teeming life of nature, they bring suddenly to the surface one side of it that the eye hardly sees in the earlier months.

The dew-drops make them more visible every morning, tracing out their beautiful designs, and so does the soft sunshine at night. Looking over the grass to the sunset along a path of saffron light, the field appears a network of little cables. Pretty lace-work gossamer webs are everywhere, floating in the air, covering every bush and every tuft of grass. From a wire fence along the field silken threads—one after another in close succession—stream, the paths by which the spiders mounted into the air in search of new worlds.

On the grass and among the bushes are two general designs of web. One of them consists of an even circular surface—threads radiating from a

centre, and strengthened with transverse threads that form a series of concentric many-sided figures; the other a bag-like net with a finer web mesh where the web narrows into the funnel-shaped entrance beneath. No rule and compass, however exact, could have made them truer to mathematical principles. Among the bushes in close connection with some of the webs are the soft silken cocoons where the young are reared, and a cosier home could hardly be imagined. One of the old spiders is generally about; often you may see him running over his web like a sailor on a rope ladder,—a large-bodied insect with brown markings on a lighter ground.

A clump of bramble bushes fills the corner of one field where two stone walls meet, and throw long, trailing stems over the deep ditch beneath. Here children come from the farm blackberrying in the season. Creamy blossoms grow on the bushes with green, red, and glossy black fruit. The leaves are of every hue, green, yellow, carmine, rose,—all the gleaming tints of autumn on each bush.

What makes such a difference of colouring in the same kind of leaves? Some young chestnut-trees colour gorgeously to the sunset, pale yellow and crimson, while the rest of the tree is still green. Between the tennis-lawn and the field a line of gean-trees all tint differently: one is green and gold, another green and carmine, still another shows no changing tint.

Then what determines the time of the fall of the leaf on similar trees? Is it soil, or the health and strength of the tree itself? Near the geantrees on the other side of the field are a row of elms; two of them, apparently of the same age, grow side by side, and though one is almost bare, the other is thickly clothed with leaves. These things are part of the absorbing interest of nature. They help to produce that wonderful charm of individuality with which she invests every living thing.

Garden trees, under the weather conditions of the season, bramble-like, have had fruit and blossom together this autumn. There were little sprays of white flower on a plum-tree when the fruit was being pulled. Later an apple-tree was covered with delicate pink blossom. On a roadside bank several bushes of broom flowered with the richness of May. More indirectly the season also affected the woodland trees; beeches, whose leaves in earlier summer curled up and withered under the ravages of fly, put forth fresh leaves late in the season.

As the day rapidly shortens large rounded masses of white cloud rise above the horizon. They seem electric and threatening, but sink again out of sight without affecting settled weather. In parts of the country they are called storm-clouds, and old people say they herald the approach of winter and an early fall of snow.

Other strange atmospheric phenomena are some-

times witnessed towards the close of the year. One evening, through a window, an unusual pearly radiance seemed to rest on everything. Outside it became even more striking. The sky was dark and clouded to the west, but lighter grey and clearer to the east. From this sky came a light that had a wonderfully revealing effect on each object it fell upon, making the outline more clear, and intensifying the colouring. The grass on the lawn beneath it became a bright emerald, the darker green of a tree was very pronounced: the crimson of the Virginia creeper, the blue of clematis flowers on a wall, the yellow fading leaves of lily of the valley, all received an intensity of colouring as if seen through a chromatic lens. Yellow elm leaves, variegated dahlias, all the differently hued flowers, showed the same intensified distinctness of colouring. Everything stood out more prominently, every detail asserted itself, yet all the time the sun was out of sight setting behind the dark cloud. After lasting for a few minutes longer the lights that gave such a weird beauty to nature rapidly faded away.

VOICES OF THE NIGHT.

OFTEN two or three shots break the stillness of the evening air close to the house. They come from the gun of the sportsman, who loves to complete his daily bag in the covert or the fields with a brace of wild duck. Every evening in the grey dusk as the year advances, these birds visit the stream to feed, and any one posted by the end of the row of old willow-trees can generally get a few shots. If there be moonlight more chances are got down to the bridge, as the birds rise from the water.

With the approach of footsteps they rise with loud flutter and whistling flight. However dark the night may be, it is easy to tell by the note whether the bird be drake or duck. Most nights you can hear the sudden sweep of a heavier wing, from a disturbed heron. Above the beech hedge he becomes visible, a large, dark object against the sky. He will circle slowly round and alight in the field, returning to his favourite fishing-pool as soon as it seems safe. Moor-hens utter their shrill, startling note—*curk*—among the dying reeds, voices in the

darkness and nothing more. Other night birds call as they pass overhead,—a woodcock flying to the marshy ground down the stream, some arriving redwings, or an oyster-catcher coming from the way of the sea to the lochs.

The lights of a neighbouring station on the branch railway gleam brightly in the frosty air across the level country, shining through the night like diamond, ruby, and emerald gems. From a higher road through the fields, the revolving light of a lighthouse, twelve miles out at sea, shows quite clearly. It flashes strong and clear, red and white lights alternately, with short intervals of darkness between.

Above, the stars are twinkling in the clear heavens. They fascinate the heart like serpent eyes with their cold glistening light. So many thoughts gather round the stars. They voice the silent immensities around them; they are the highest visible embodiment of the eternal. All the geological formations of earth, all the strange chain of life, from the eozoon to man himself, form but a hand-breadth in the duration of the stars. One day with them is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. To man's own heart, as in a mirror, they reveal its greatness. Under the stars I am older than human history, older than all those creatures that have ever appeared on earth, older than the hills and their rocky framework,—time falls away from the spirit beneath their cold, pale light.

Earthly distance, in the same way, is dwarfed by the distant stars; they make absence more easy to bear. We said good-bye beneath the glaring lights of a large and busy station. The train rushed out into the darkness, and a deep sense of separation and distance fell on the heart. But here to-night my friend in a far country is brought closer to me, because the same star shines for us both. It is our star, his and mine together; its light is the embodied thought of him whom I cannot see. Out among the fields in the starlight, the future which is our glorified past becomes almost visible, and heart talks with heart of the things that are to be.

Coming home at night from a round of visits, I love to watch them. They hold converse with the spirit as familiar friends, and bring it a feeling of companionship. They take something of my own humanity and give it back again enlarged to me. Constellation rises after constellation from the eastern sea, and, with the changing seasons, new ones take the place of the old. There are some that the heart loses with a twinge of regret, as a traveller who journeys southward over the midnight waters and goes on deck for a last look of the old home stars.

Great Sirius is shining with a clear flashing light. Higher on the broad field of heaven is Orion the hunter with his jewelled belt. He arrests the eye among the starry constellations by the power of his splendid personality. Before

him flies the Bull with bloodshot eye, and rapidly ascending the Lion appears to follow the huntsman himself. Over the sky they gather in their many thousands, constellations and single stars, giant worlds contracted by untold distances to mere points of light. Pursuing their noiseless pathways, they mark on the dial-face of heaven the times and seasons of the year. From horizon to horizon the milky way reaches, the white spray from an invisible ocean of starry space.

Two planets—Jupiter and Mercury—are following one another rapidly to the south-west. Through a fairly strong glass we saw four of Jupiter's satellites some nights ago. The yew-hedge made a rest for the telescope, and a convenient tree in front with its interlacing branches helped to define the planet's position in the sky. So clear was the air that we appeared to see two of his moons with the eye alone.

A fast train passes in the darkness, the engine panting loudly and sending up a fountain of sparks, the carriages a long line of light. On moist, foggy nights a glow appears from the open furnace-door of the engine. It forms a strong beam of rays made visible by the watery vapour in the air, and reflected from the denser cloud above. Long after the train has passed the light can be seen swaying backward and forward with the vibrations of the engine and the windings of the railway, as a search-light that scans the sky. When the engine-fires

show so brightly, a ruddy glare rests above the surrounding towns, — the accumulated reflection from the clouds of their numerous lights. From the higher ground of the parish the position of eight of them, at least, is marked by this reflected light. Often it appears to flicker unsteadily, and, until it becomes familiar, gives the impression of a distant fire.

Many winter nights in the country are "a horror of great darkness." Every footstep along the road brings the body crash against a solid wall. Above as well as around is the same impenetrable gloom. The scattered household lights are soon lost in it. Everywhere the blackness of night lies thick and bewildering; earth has become a trackless desert, where every footstep seems to carry one farther into the unknown. Those who leave home on such nights take strong lanterns to show them the way.

The few social public gatherings are arranged for moonlight evenings, and so is a good deal of neighbourly visiting. With frosty weather the paths through the fields are firm as city pavement. The nights themselves feel pleasanter than the dull, cold, wintry day, and though the smaller birds are asleep among the most sheltered bushes, more four-footed creatures are abroad. The air is clearer, as if the full moon in her shining pathway through the midst of heaven had a greater power of dispelling cloudy vapour than the low-hung sun.

Young and old love the witchery of the moonlight. Happy shouts rise from the field pond in the hollow, where the children are sliding on the frost-bound water. The country has lost its wintry bareness in the beautifully clear light. On everything the moonbeams fall, renewing and idealising all the land. Every tree and bush, every wall and hedgerow, with the long wire-fences between the fields, are reproduced on the ground in clear-cut shadow. You are walking in a world of shadows, and yet there is little tendency to dreamy, impracticable thoughts. The very shadows are solid and real to the eye; the air feels crisp and chill against the face; the steps ring out loud and firm from the frosty road; and the rapidly coursing blood produces a feeling of fuller and more active life. It is a night for great decisions and large purposes, while the heart itself grows more conscious of new sources of strength to undertake them.

Beyond the dark pine-wood the hills slumber on the horizon. Their great rounded summits rise into the pale-blue sky. Every outline is clearly marked, more clearly than by day, when part of the hill is lost in the excess of surrounding light. Thus they appear larger and nearer in the clear moonlight night. The trees produce the same effect with their stout limbs and leafless branches. Each tree reveals its distinct individuality whenever it passes from shadow into light—the pen-

dulous birch, the rugged elm, the large-stemmed ash-tree. An oak in the fields suggests strength by the erectness of its pose from trunk to highest twigs.

What the eye misses in this night landscape is the warmth of colour. Apart from the blue starry sky over it and the coloured railway lights, all about is a wide expanse of black, and white, and pale greys. Little variety of flower and leaf remains to relieve the season, and, even if there were far more, the distinctive colours would be lost in the moonlight. Bright green mosses on the roadside bank are silvery grey where the radiant moonbeams fall upon them. It needs the sunshine to give full expression to colour; there is a close connection between its production and its effect. This note of colour is largely wanting by moonlight; the picture is photographic, or a study in black and white rather than a work in oils. In the absence of the distracting influence of colour, form appeals more directly to the mind. But form in nature is less sensuous, and carries the thoughts nearer to the heart of things.

WINTRY WEATHER.

ALL the forenoon the snow has been falling fast. It is hard to realise the sudden change. Three days ago the sun shone brightly, and the air felt balmy as a warm September day. But it was unnaturally mild for November, and at last our country weather-prophets are rejoicing in the fulfilment of their often-repeated forebodings. Bright, warm weather, with a lovely afterglow and wonderful pearly lights one day, sunshine chilled by a cutting wind next one, and the morning after a deep fall of snow. For three days it has fallen heavily, and a strong gale from the north has filled every hollow with driving storm.

What a strange fascination, an everlasting novelty, there is in falling snowflakes! They appeal to a side of us that is common to youth and age. The years fall away as we watch them, and we are children again, finding the same wonder, the same mystery, the same charm in their ceaseless fall. The grey and evil days of life are forgotten, and a feeling of childlike tenderness and innocence—an innocence of purer hope and aspira-

tion—rises in the heart before the spotless snow. The very abandon of youth returns; you are old in years—older, perhaps, in experience—and yet you want to shout for very joy, as yesterday the child in you did it, to catch the undulating feathery flakes, to press once again the untrodden snow, pillowing yourself on it as on a bed of down.

From the shelter of the covered doorway it is a delight to look out upon the snowflakes falling so ceaselessly and silently. Not quite silently; a soft, muffled sound comes from their incessant fall—a sound as of distant footsteps on the snow. Some flakes are large and feathery—irregularly branched snow masses—others circular and starlike; others still, tiny granules of snow. One comes straight and fast to the white ground; another lingers in the air, descending with a swaying, flickering motion; another circles as it falls. Far as the eye can penetrate the snow-laden atmosphere are innumerable snowflakes. They suggest infinite number more than anything in Nature—more than the sand, or the stars, or the rain-drops themselves. The distinctness with which each snow-flake impresses its individuality on the wintry air increases the sense of their number. Higher up they appear to move parallel to the earth, struggling to pass into space by the rapidity of their flight; lower the snow meteors come straighter down under an irresistible power of gravity. The upper snow-flakes cross the sky like great flights of snow birds. A

sudden gust moans among the leafless trees, and the shower has become a mad whirl of falling flakes. It is not a steady downfall; the shower has its pauses and swells, its ebbs and flows, like the heart of man or the heart of the ocean. Listen, and you can almost hear the deep pulsations of the storm, as if somewhere overhead there were a great engine throbbing and panting, and pausing to throb and pant again. Now the snow-flakes fall in thick cloud-drifts; now the air is opener; then another cloud-drift of madly-whirling flakes. Some rooks are flying low in front of the manse. Ghostly birds in the storm, their harsh croak as they pass makes them more ghostly still. A few larks cross the house, twittering from the fields. The cold chirp, chirp of a redbreast in the bushes is the only other living sound.

The birds come in stormy weather to the garden, under the study window, to be fed. There the soft snow is beaten firm by their tiny feet. The feast that man's charity provides for them in the day of their distress is amply repaid; they bring with them memories of June flowers and green meadows; they are promises of brighter and more tuneful days to come. When roads and pathways are bedded deep in snow, the heart finds in them a link with the outside world of life. By giving it expression the birds, in a measure, satisfy the soul-thirst for more life—that strange, deep craving which sometimes in the quiet country becomes an uncontrollable

passion, seeking instinctively the rush of the busy street, and making the noise of the never-ending crowd as grateful as the glad murmur of the river of life.

What a motley crowd of pensioners there are!—blackbirds, starlings, sparrows, redbreasts, and many more. They afford interesting studies of bird character, though—one is sorry to confess it—at its worst rather than its best, under the stress and pinch of hunger. The struggle for existence, growing intenser with the increasing cold, has dulled their finer sensibilities, and selfishness for the moment reigns supreme. One orange-billed blackbird is a perfect tyrant; he comes with a rush, and scatters the crowd of smaller birds. The redbreast and hedge-sparrow bully their own kind. House-sparrows search for large pieces of bread, and then fly hastily away with them to a sheltered spot. One or two thrushes come sometimes, but they keep on the skirts of the crowd, and are always on the alert for danger. Through their shy nature they suffer more from severe weather than the hardier blackbird, and numbers die. In summer, when he is absorbed in his song, the thrush is very tame. You can almost touch one on a branch above the drive then, but through the colder days of winter he is the shyest of birds. There are tit visitors, too—a race by themselves, quaint little creatures, mountebanks of feathered life, gipsies begging for their dole, and then returning to their

native woods. Rooks come in lengthened stormy weather, watching a favourable opportunity from the taller trees; so—though more rarely—do common gulls. These keep circling in the air, and dive from time to time for a likely piece of food. Another wanderer from the sea, a much rarer bird, —the little auk,—was found one morning, after a heavy gale, dead on the snow by a garden-path. Moor-hens find their way up from the stream and seek shelter in the laurel bushes. Their long, heavy, dragging footmarks are easily recognisable in the snow. Early of a morning a covey of partridges, with fluffy feathers, sit by the yew hedge, and pheasants wander about the grounds.

Birds suffer most from a sudden March storm. Their vital energy, their power of resisting cold, seems almost exhausted by earlier storms, and large numbers of them perish in an inclement March. Then the lapwings gather from the uplands to the field by the stream. The rushy tufts are a shelter from the driving snow, and there are always moist parts in the field or by the ditch-side where they can search for food. All day long and most of the night they scream their doleful notes—*peet, peet;* these sound continually in the intervals of the storm. A few years ago, after a heavy fall of snow with intense cold in early March, reports of the destruction of birds came from every part of the country. In the

rushy field alone two redwings and several lapwings were found dead, and in the fields farther down the stream were a good few more. Very few thrushes survived; the summer after their favourite haunts were almost quite silent. The difference was very marked for these cold wintry March days; the ear missed the thrush minstrelsy from the chorus of the spring; the volume of bird song was a world poorer without its leading voices.

The manse redbreasts escape the intense cold of winter by seeking the shelter of the house. Two came at the beginning of one long-continued storm and stayed right through it. One of them did not leave until spring had well come. He got quite fearless of the inmates, pecking crumbs wherever he found them. On sunny days he sat on the banisters of the staircase and sang brightly. If by any chance he found himself outside, he watched for the first opportunity of returning to his warmer indoor quarters. But at last the nesting season sent this petted favourite out to rejoin his neglected mate, and to build with her their cosy nest among the ivy leaves.

Hares come very near to the manse in the winter moonlight. When the door is opened the scurry of their feet is heard from the frosty snow. We are lingering a little longer out of doors to-night, well clad, for the cold is very keen. The clock of a neighbouring village church is striking ten. Every

stroke is quite distinct as it travels through the frosty air. Across the rising ground comes a deep unceasing sound: it is the beating of the surf on the distant shore. How peaceful the scene is; how wintry, and yet how beautiful! The yew hedge is almost hidden under its snowy curtain; the evergreens bend beneath great snow masses; every tree-twig overhead is outlined in new-fallen snow; beneath the field is one wide sheet of dazzling whiteness. The feathery army has ceased to fall. Its work is done; the snowy locust hosts have covered the land and devoured every green thing. Above the sky is blue, with a delicate tracery of cirrus clouds rivalling the whiteness of the snow itself. The full moon is overhead, showering her radiant beams on everything: the stars about her shine faintly in the excess of light. We cannot go indoors even yet—not until we have walked to the stream over the crisping snow. The water flows, a long line of silvery radiance under the transfiguring rays; every rapid, every ripple gleams in the brilliant moonlight. The murmur of the stream is louder than by day; it is the requiem of the sheeted earth. One treads softly, as in some chamber of death; the very crisp, crisp of the foot is a desecration of nature's sacred calm. Before the advancing footsteps there seems a halo over the snow, out of which flash living diamond gems. Just one moment more,—it is so hard to leave it, all the beauty and the silence that has found a voice for it. Deep is calling unto deep,

the spiritual in man to the spiritual in nature. This is one of life's supreme moments. Great thoughts tremble on the verge of consciousness; the mind cannot think them, but the heart feels them, and some day they may incarnate themselves in thought.

DECEMBER DAYS.

"NULLA dies sine linea" is the motto of nature. She keeps a journal which she writes up diligently from the first to the last day of the year. To the open eye of loving sympathy there is not a single dull line, nor one that could be blotted out without serious loss. In her annual volume the interest is kept up to the very end, and though the main lines may be the same, an infinite detail constantly changes from year to year.

There is a great deal of interest in the last month of all, and every day of it in the country provides something to note. It is the dead time of the year only to those who are ignorant of nature. If the weather be mild and open, already the forces of growth are beginning to set themselves in motion, and to find visible expression in some flower or leaf. Last year's plants have not quite shed all their blossom: wild heartsease, dove's-foot crane's-bill, white campion, feverfew, chickweed, and several others, provide a show of colour in sheltered places, feeble in itself, but rich in pleasant suggestions and bright hopes, like a relic of happy days that will come again.

The hardy oak retains some leaves amid the general leaflessness of the wood. If the tree be young these leaves will last till spring, turning buff-coloured, and rustling shrilly in the March winds. In the last month of the year many of them have not yet lost an opaque-green tint of leaf, and in the distance may be mistaken among the bare trees around them for an evergreen like the holly.

On the dog-rose there is still some colour from the scarlet hips, and the young shoots keep their vivid green through the winter. Though fieldfares, redwings, and other thrushes rise from the hawthorn bushes in flocks, they have not stripped all the coral berries from the leafless branches.

Colour, too, is provided by the birds themselves in this the most colourless month of the year. Most of them are flocking in the fields or haunting the trim stackyards of garnered grain — greenfinches, chaffinches, and yellow-hammers. When they perch on bush and tree, not even in spring does the brightness of their colouring appeal so much to the eye,— the ruddy and bright yellow of the yellow-hammer, the pink and chestnut-brown of the chaffinch, or the green and gold of the greenfinch. No one who is unfamiliar with our wild birds in December can well imagine of what an amount of colour and beauty their plumage is capable.

Other notes of colour come from the mosses that make a soft carpet by the woodland path, passing through every shade from lightest olive to darkest

green. They and the humble lichen, covering every old wall and tree-stump, are at their best now, flourishing in the dullest and coldest weather. When all traces of it are lost in its accustomed channels, through moss and humble lichen the river of life flows in the barren time of the year.

Among the fields the croak of the grey crow is heard, and several are often seen together, but in the middle of the field, for they are the most wary of birds. Scattered feathers are found by the hedges, and marks of blood-drops or pieces of flesh near them. They tell their own tale of the sparrow-hawk's cruel work. He follows the flocking birds and sadly reduces their numbers. Now is one of his richest harvest-times, for the hedges afford no shelter nor the ploughed fields any cover from his merciless pursuit. He strikes the birds down at his pleasure, sparing neither sweet-voiced thrush nor tuneful linnet. In the hollow of one field-road, where the bushes overhung and sheltered it, the remains of five linnets were found within as many yards. The ceaseless ravage of the sparrow-hawk helps to explain why, with last year's added broods, the bird numbers never increase.

This is the season to see the nests that were so successfully hidden among the leaves. Along the road, in the thick hawthorn hedge where last summer's tufted vetches hang their shrivelled stems, you come upon them at almost every step, nests of thrush, and finch, and warbler. In the trees

that grow in the hedge they are also abundant, and it is an interest to study those that the birds most affect for nesting. In elm or oak there are few if any nests; in chestnut-trees, Spanish especially, more are to be seen; and in sycamore—called with us the plane-tree—most of all. The forked branches of this tree form cup-shaped hollows that afford perfect nesting sites.

Some December days are wonderfully mild. They set life stirring in plant and tree-bud long before its time. Wild creatures move abroad that in colder weather are sound at rest. The sheltered roadsides have swarms of gnats dancing in the brief sunshine. More moths fly about at night, enough to tempt many of the bats out again from their winter retreats. On the earlier December nights of 1905, after they had disappeared for some time, as many as four bats might have been counted together above one road.

But such weather is usually the prelude to a very severe time. Country people prefer snow and frost in December as more seasonable and healthy; they have a proverb that a green Yule makes a full kirkyard. Frost kills vermin in the soil, and changes its barren clods into plant-food, so that real, old-fashioned wintry weather in the short day gives promise of an earlier spring and a better agricultural season altogether. Besides, snow is much more comfortable in the last month of the year. Spring storms are very disagreeable if they con-

tinue any time; it is hard to keep a dry footing on the slushy roads, and the glare from the increasing sunshine on the dazzling waste of white snow becomes very trying to the eye. Man feels the discomfort all the more that then the pulse of life has begun to beat more strongly in his own heart, as in the heart of nature outside of him, and mysterious forces urge him afield. But in the December day with its early falling darkness he is more contented with indoor pleasures — the blazing fire and the friendly talk or the interesting book.

The day itself has its own interests for those who are not too careful about roads or weather, and in a short walk through the fields it is wonderful how much may be seen. At any season you never need to go far in the country for objects of interest: only keep your eyes open, and nature herself will do the rest. She will bring them right to your feet. That has always been my own experience, and I have found some of my most interesting nature studies close to my own door.

In December the fields are bare; the crops have been stored, and you may walk almost wherever you please. One day I took a walk through the nearer ones in what is regarded as the dullest season of the year. Overhead was a cold, grey, stormy sky, from which the snow fell in small spicules, with an occasional larger flake. The air was tense and silent; a thick haze hung round

the horizon; everything foreboded a heavy storm. From the field-side, a few yards ahead, a hare rose and passed through an open gateway into the stubble of another field, where more than a dozen moor-hens were feeding. It ran leisurely, and the birds showed no alarm. There was a deep stillness, broken only by the cold chirruping note of larks. Even the corn-bunting had become dumb: all song was frozen into silence. The grass was beautifully coated with hoar-frost; but nearer the stream the rimy cold went right through one. From the muddy ground at the mouth of a ditch eight snipe rose, and offered an ideal right and left to a sportsman. Farther along the stream more got up, forty birds at least, with some smaller, beautifully marked jack-snipe. They had evidently not long arrived, and appeared tired, lying close until the footsteps had come very near them, and pitching very soon again. Their *sceap, sceap*, uttered as they flew, sounded like a querulous note of discontent at being disturbed.

The clumps of bur-reeds had almost all been washed under the surface of the stream; but broken bulrush stems and leaves still rose from the dark, chilly water. Every vole had gone to cover in some cosy hole; but several brown rats disappeared into the burrows in the opposite banks. The scarcity of cover, where it was so abundant in summer, had made the moor-hens change their usual habits. Instead of seeking the stream, they flew to the

shelter of some spruce-trees. Among these, high perched in the thick branches, they spend the long winter nights.

Near the old curling-ponds was a redwing thrush that had already begun to feel the pinch of the cold. Very diligently it searched for food in the short grass, giving strong pecks in its despair. It had lost all sense of fear, and refused to go any distance: its *quip, quip*, like the snipe's note, was a sound of protest. The well-marked streak above the eye, the ruddy side, and the pale-blue back showed vividly against the whitening ground.

The trees in one field corner at the top of the ponds were dreadfully barked. It was a sorry sight, for almost all of them, fine, vigorous trees, were destroyed beyond all hope; only one or two spruces and gnarled willows were left untouched. The wood divested of its bark showed white and glaring: the damage had been done lately. The height to which the trees were barked, and the mark of large teeth, gave a clue to the cause of the mischief: horses had been the culprits. When turned out into a field where there are trees, they do a power of harm in this way.

But the day was closing fast. A flock of snow-buntings passed in the air with a rich, full, musical note. A hardy wren sang cheerily in the growing storm, before seeking shelter in the ivy by the manse door. The trees were already outlined in snow, and next morning there was a heavy fall.

A FAREWELL.

THROUGH the study windows all the pageant of the seasons wrought itself out from year to year in the garden and in the fields. The sunsets were lovely in autumn, and one window, from its position and height, made a favourite place for seeing them. Some evenings the western heavens over the woods were a revelation of beauty in its tenderest and most delicate hues. The heart was never satisfied, and the eyes gazed until the richer dyes passed into steely greys, and the steely greys passed into night.

Amid many tender memories, to-day I stand and look through the windows. The thoughts are like the autumn landscape beneath, for I must soon leave it. All the days, and weeks, and years that have been spent here, with their tale of joy and sorrow, are fast coming to an end. I am closing a chapter of life among well-known scenes and kindly faces. The new and the unknown are before me, and the heart is heavy with the thought.

Let me look, again and again, on the old and the loved. Every little detail stands out with a strange

vividness under the shadow of approaching separation. I appear to see things that I never saw before. The landscape is new to me still, though I have looked on it so often. Let me look on it, just once, with the devouring eyes of a lover, that I may carry it with me as a joy and strength in the days to come. It will be some compensation, so much of myself must be left here.

Through this window are the trees, and the rushy field, and the stream that bounds it. Fields and woods from the other bank carry the eyes along the uplands to the horizon and the sky above. A train rushes past: in the new place we will miss the noise and rush of the passing trains.

Another look through the window to the garden. The colours of autumn are creeping into it, and into the large beeches beside the old manse. Many of the leaves have already fallen. A tall sunflower hangs its heavy head by the gate, bright yellow petals circling round the dark centre. The blue clematis flowers are over, but there is a bed of phloxes, and another of gay chrysanthemums, where the plant clothes the wall. Let me note everything lovingly. Behind the wall is the road to the fields, and, on the farther side, the little church and the bat-haunted aisle in God's own garden. There lie many friends of my ministry, and their faces come again, and the tones of their kind voices fill the heart. Many a lesson have I learned from you, friends of the past. Many a burden have ye lifted.

Many a word have ye spoken that brought strength in the day of battle. Farewell is for earth and the living. I do not bid you farewell.

One memorial stone fills the eye; it had been set up within sight of the study window. Morning by morning the eye rested on it across the garden; the short inscription, with its gilt letters, was almost clear enough to be read. There is a comfort in being near the place of one's dead, and the dearest dead lies buried there. Home from the sea, home from a far country, home in sore trouble and weakness—home, if it were but home to die. Home at last; it was he that taught me to pray from my heart, God bring every wayfarer safe home. I look to the place where once I had thought to sleep beside him the sleep of years. But I must leave it too, the sacred spot, and the vision of the stone from the study window.

To-day I look over the garden to the place, once again and once again, it holds so much of my heart. There are successes that come too late in life, because another cannot say how glad he is, but perhaps he knows it all the same. Isn't it a mercy, however far we go from the place of their rest, that God takes care of our dead for us—that they are asleep in His garden? Just once I look, for it is not good to brood on sorrows. As the kind-hearted give a cup of water, some one may lay on his grave one of the wild flowers that he loved when I am gone.

It is hard to tear up life by the roots when its roots

are so firmly planted. It is hard to leave the old, the tried, and the trusted. Hard it is to leave the home of so many happy memories. The vision of it in sunshine and storm will haunt the heart; the thought of it, too, in the night, with the broad shining beam from the window guiding the footsteps through the darkness up the gravelled drive, or the light that streamed across the fields to the road alongside the railway,—a strong beacon to tell of home, and comfort, and rest.

The trees and the rushy field and the stream are calling to me. A cloud, driven by the wind across the sky, has begun to blur everything with fast-falling raindrops, and the spirit sees in them the expression of its own sadness. Every heart knows its own bitterness, and nature is not ashamed to weep. I have loved her, and this is nature's answer; all the old scenes are calling to me through her tears.

Good-bye, loved haunts of many years. Good-bye, all who live among them. Good-bye, Charlie, best of beadles. Good-bye, many a kind, kind heart.

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